

Progress on Pesticide Collection Legislation

By Tom Shanahan

Today, a little recognized environmental threat is hidden in thousands of barns across this state. Ironically, this threat was created because the farmers who own those barns are good citizens, and do not want to pollute the environment.

This threat comes from delabelled agrichemicals and pesticides - compounds once approved for agricultural use, but which are now prohibited by the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Because there has never been an organized, ongoing, statewide program to collect and safely dispose of these unused pesticides, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of pounds of them remain stored in barns and storage sheds across this state.

That's why New York Rural Water has taken the lead in pushing for legislation to establish an organized, ongoing, statewide program to collect and safely dispose of unused agrichemicals and pesticides. This legislation has been sponsored for the last three years by Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli, who chairs the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, and Senator Carl Marcellino, who chairs the Environmental Conservation Committee in the Senate. Although this legislation did not go all the way this session, we enjoyed some measure of success. It passed the Assembly, and was reported from committee to the floor of the Senate, where it had a calendar number, and could have been considered at any time.

It is always harder to pass legislation than to prevent its passage. There is good reason for this. Once a law is on the books, a great many people can be affected by its provisions, and it is harder to undo the damage caused by a bad law than to simply delay its passage in the first place. So a great deal of care is always taken before a law is passed. Often, one of the reasons a Legislator agrees to introduce legislation, is to see who objects to the idea, and what their reasons are.

Last year, we worked on amending the bill to overcome some concerns lodged by the Sierra Club. We reached a mutual agreement to satisfy their objections, and they have now joined in support of the bill. This year, the chemical companies which produce these pesticides have expressed concerns. In preliminary discussions with representatives of those companies, they have indicated they are not unalterably opposed to the legislation, since there are advantages to having a statewide collection and disposal system. We believe that we may be able to come to an agreement by the time the Legislature reconvenes in January.

There will also be a new Governor in January, and that could well have an impact on how the bill is viewed by the state DEC.

Besides Rural Water, the bill is supported by the New York Conference of Mayors, NYPIRG, Suffolk County Water

Authority, the Long Island Water Conference, and Environmental Advocates of New York, as well as the Sierra Club.

New York State requires an organized, ongoing, statewide program to collect and safely dispose of unused agrichemicals and pesticides. With the leadership of New York Rural Water, we are well on the way to making that happen.

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In Appreciation...

Dear Ms. Scalera,

Thank you for your
commitment to assisting
high school graduates in
furthering their educations.

It is an honor to be a
recipient of the 2006 New
York Rural Water Association
Founder's Scholarship. I thank
you for your support in
furthering my education.

Sincerely,
Anita Sakel-Davidson