

Press Release

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Report: Lawn Fertilizers Are Contaminating Long Island's Water with PFAS, Plastic, and Excessive Nitrogen

Scientists Say Certain Lawn Fertilizers Pose a "Triple Threat" to Human Health and the Environment

(Port Washington, NY) A coalition of environmental and community organizations operating under the banner "LI Water" is issuing a report today maintaining that some types of popular lawn fertilizers are contributing to the pollution of drinking and surface waters on Long Island. Products containing PFAS ("forever") chemicals, micro- and nanoplastic particles, and excess water-soluble nitrogen are being sold and used by homeowners and landscape professionals, who may be unaware of their potential harm to the environment and human health. The groups claim that a combination of consumer education, action by local towns and villages, cooperation by Long Island retailers, and possibly legislation is needed to fix the growing problem.

"Not all environmental problems have inexpensive, achievable solutions, but this one does," says Doug Wood, Associate Director of Grassroots Environmental Education, which is spearheading the coalition. "There are plenty of lawn fertilizer products that can produce excellent results without putting our water, our health, or future generations at risk. We just have to make better choices."

The report, " Trouble in the Grass: How PFAS, Microplastics, and Excess Nitrogen in Lawn Fertilizers Threaten Long Island's Drinking Water, Ecosystems, and Human Health," details how plastic particles in biosolids or used as coverings for granules break down with exposure to the sun and rain and eventually disintegrate into tiny particles that either become airborne where they can be inhaled, or wash away into our bays and streams with stormwater where they negatively impact aquatic life. The health impacts of exposure to microplastics has become an urgent concern worldwide.

The report also documents how PFAS chemicals end up in lawn fertilizers, either from biosolids (sewage sludge) or from manufacturing processes. These "forever" chemicals can leach through soil into underground aquifers. The report notes that the EPA has recommended a drinking water standard of 4 parts per trillion for **two** of the more than 12,000 types of PFAS - the equivalent of four drops of water in twenty Olympic-sized swimming pools. Levels of these chemicals in many Long Island communities are already high.

Finally, the report explains how lawn fertilizers with high levels of nitrogen (above 12%) are much more likely to pollute our water than products with low levels. The report also notes that natural fertilizers generally release their nutrients over time as the plants need them, rather than releasing them on contact with moisture, which allows much of the synthetic product to either run off with stormwater or penetrate past the root zone of grass plants and into our underground aquifers.

Copies of the report are available at the coalition's website, www.LIWater.org.

About LI Water

LIWater.org is a coalition project of Grassroots Environmental Education and is comprised of environmental and civic organizations across Long Island, including Sierra Club of Long Island, Operation Splash!, Save the Great South Bay, Peconic Baykeeper, Group for the East End, Seatuck Environmental Association, Friends of Bellport Bay, Defend H2O, Perfect Earth Project, and the Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island (CRESLI).