



Contact: Rusty Stachlewitz
Email: Rusty@TheLawnInstitute.org
Phone: 1(800)405-8873
www.TheLawnInstitute.org

For Immediate Release:

The Lawn Institute Finds Unexpected Link Between Expanding Obesity and Shrinking Lawns

Americans are getting fatter and fatter. We see reports of this phenomenon frequently in the news and even more so in the malls (especially around the fast-food court).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that poor diet and physical inactivity caused 400,000 deaths in 2000, a 33 percent increase, over 1990. Big meals and not enough exercise are probably the most readily identified causes for obesity. Other factors include individual preferences for driving versus walking and taking elevators rather than stairs. At home, we sit on the deck, patio or couch and play computer games rather than yard games. Busy schedules and worries about child safety might be part of the problem...adults are busy working or car-pooling their kids to supervised activities, and they express concerns about allowing their kids to ride bikes in the area or even play games in the yard.

A brief statement in 2004 by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson started a new line of exploratory thinking. At a press conference to announce the new "Focus on Your Health: Physical Fitness" program, Secretary Thompson said, "Playing with your kids in the backyard for an hour each day can help the whole family stay healthy." The staff of The Lawn Institute began to ponder if that simple advice could in fact be put into practice. They asked, "How likely is it that a sizeable number of Americans have a backyard where they could play with their kids?" The results of their admittedly non-scientific research were astounding.

For starters, consider these side-by-side, subject-related quotes from two reputable, but seldom-linked sources, The Earth Policy Institute and the National Association of Home Builders. Both organizations are headquartered in Washington, D.C., just blocks apart from each other.

<p style="text-align: center;">Quotes from “Earth Policy Institute” December 19, 2000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Quotes from “Housing Economics” National Assn. of Home Builders</p>
<p>“The incidence of obesity among children has more than doubled over the last 30 years.”</p>	<p>“During the past 30 years, the floor area in new homes has been rising.”(December, 2002)</p>
<p>“Obesity is concentrated in cities. As societies urbanize and people adopt sedentary lifestyles, obesity increases.”</p> <p>“The latest U.S. survey shows that 57 percent of Americans exercise only occasionally or not at all, a number that corresponds closely with the share of the population that is overweight.”</p>	<p>“Based on the latest classifications of urban and metropolitan areas, 79 percent of the population in 2000 was urban and nearly 83 percent lived in metropolitan areas. Back in 1910 only 29 percent of the population was urban.” (January, 2004)</p> <p>“Census data showed that 45 percent of new homes had a patio, 48 had a porch and 29 percent had a deck.” (December, 2002)</p>

While America’s population is getting larger, its home lawns are getting smaller.

Consider these observations:

- Home sizes are increasing and individual residential lot sizes are being reduced to address “urban sprawl” issues. Homebuilders also like this profit increasing approach.
- Between 1986 and 2002 (17 years), the median square footage of new single family homes expanded 41.1 percent, from 1,655 to 2,336 square feet.
- A greater percentage of smaller lots are being covered in hard surfaces such big houses, patios, decks, sidewalks or driveways for three-car garages, leaving less space for landscaping.
- Outdoor water conservation ordinances can restrict areas for grass planting, and some cities are even paying homeowners a sizeable amount to remove existing grass from their landscape.
- Garden writers, designers and plant merchandisers encourage the use of colorful flowers, mulch beds or rock and water gardens as a grass replacement.

From yet a different perspective, consider these comparisons of calories burned various activities being done for 60-minuutes by people weighing 180 or 130 pounds.

(There are a multitude of readily available calorie calculating programs on the web.)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>180 lbs</i>	<i>130 lbs</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>180 lbs</i>	<i>130 lbs</i>
Golf: using cart	302	218	Gardening: general	389	281
Weight Lifting: vigorous	518	374	Mowing Lawn: push, hand	475	343
Weight Lifting: general	259	187	Mowing Lawn: push, power	389	281

Based on the Lawn Institute's initial assessments, there is indeed a strong link between increases in obesity and reductions in lawns. While not a one-size- fits-all formula, its seems certain that encouraging larger lawns and more activities on those lawns... including viewing lawn care as a valuable form of exercise...could not make problem with obesity any worse, and there's a very high likelihood that as the lawns increased, the sizes of the people would decrease.

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