

FYI - July 2007

Safer Alternatives: utility poles

If you have lived in Newton for a while, you have probably noticed the gradual but steady proliferation of utility poles and wires on our city streets. Many of these poles are doubled up with connecting pieces of wood and big metal clamps. None of it is pretty.

“Undergrounding” of utility poles is the norm in many places. It is driven mainly by esthetic and safety concerns, but there are also sound environmental reasons to stop using these utility poles. The main concern is that utility poles are treated with a wood preservative, pentachlorophenol, or penta, a “restricted use pesticide”. This moderately toxic chemical, which enters our soil, air and groundwater as it leaches from wood, has been banned in 26 countries, and is known to pose serious risks to utility workers and children.

The Newton Task Force on Undergrounding Utilities www.newtonundergrounding.com is working to facilitate the work of undergrounding and to ensure that it will be cost-effective---and that utility companies will pay their fair share. To join a resident survey team to help assess “the wired infrastructure in all of Newton’s neighborhoods”, send your name, address and zip code to undergrounding@newtonma.gov.

Human Behavior

“The trouble with humans is that even the smallest changes in our behavior require an epiphany. And yet compared to the fixity of other species, the narrowness of their habitats, the strictness of their diets, the precision of the niches they occupy, we are flexibility itself. We look around us, expecting the rest of the world’s occupants to adapt to the changes that we have caused, when, in fact, we have the right to expect adaptation only from ourselves.”

Verlyn Klinkenborg

NYTimes 6/19/07, Editorial Observer: Millions of Missing Birds, Vanishing in Plain Sight