

# FROM THE PUBLISHER



Recently, the Milwaukee Sentinel ran a story which referred to the speculation that there might be an association between the organic fertilizer, Milorganite, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS - or Lou Gehrig's disease.) Needless to say this was shattering news. If true it could destroy a business that took six decades to build.

With all the controversy our industry has encountered with the pesticide sensitivity problem, this latest outburst becomes very costly in terms of reputation. Speculation about Milorganite grew out of the discovery of a cluster of ALS victims, three San Francisco 49ers football players who played together on a field where Milorganite was used.

Public health officials, including representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, have examined the issue and concluded that the so-called association was no more than speculation. There is no hard evidence that Milorganite has been destroyed.

Some time later, after the damage was done, health officials gathered at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics for a meeting prompted by the news reports. At that meeting, federal and state epidemiologists criticized Benjamin Brooks, an ALS researcher at the University of Wisconsin- Madison, for the comments he made. Alfred Rimm, an epidemiologist with the Medical College of Wisconsin, told Brooks at that meeting: "I sort of feel that you have found a product guilty of murder, and it's totally innocent."

Henry Anderson, a chronic disease epidemiologist with the State Division of Health, told Brooks: "Associating the disease with Milorganite was premature and speculative." But the damage was done.

I am disturbed to think that newspapers, politicians, environmental groups and researchers make statements without back up. The media picks it up and the product in question is immediately put on the defensive. Sales drop radically. The company that markets the particular product now has to defend itself.

It is later revealed that the product was not the cause, however, the cost of having to overcome the negative publicity becomes enormous. It may take years for that product to reach the level of sales it had just prior to the adverse publicity.

We can't control what people say, certainly there is a case for research, but I wish the media wouldn't pick up on it so fast and throw a scare into the public. We should not "shoot first and ask questions later."

I believe we all have a duty to protect human life, but do we have to destroy the livelihood of people who are employed by business that sells product before all the evidence is in? If the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District did not respond as quickly as it did, Milorganite might be history.

I believe their quick response saved the day and will help protect their markets. Other companies are going to have to respond as quickly should their products come under attack.

If you have used Milorganite in the past and it's done well by you, by all means ask the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District for more information about this. You will find you can continue to use it and feel comfortable about its safety.