

## MILORGANITE CLEARED OF ASSOCIATION WITH LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE

An epidemiologist has concluded that there is no statistical evidence to support the recent accusation by a Wisconsin neurologist that Milorganite may have caused three San Francisco 49ers football players to contract Lou Gehrig's disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS). Sales of Milorganite and other sludge-based fertilizers and composts declined after the *Milwaukee Sentinel* ran a story based upon information from Dr. Benjamin Brooks, a University of Wisconsin-Madison researcher.

Alfred Rimm, Ph.D., professor of biostatistics and epidemiology at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, has reported after an in-depth study that any link between Milorganite and ALS is "preposterous." Rimm reviewed medical records from the past five years to compare exposure to Milorganite with the incidence of ALS. "If anything, the incidence of ALS in southern Wisconsin, the area with the highest exposure to Milorganite, was lower than you would expect to find in any large city," reports Rimm. The incidence of ALS in the area was 1.24 cases for every 100,000 people compared to 1.9 cases per 100,000 found in major U.S. cities. "Furthermore, there has been only one case of ALS out of all the Milwaukee Sewerage District em-

ployees in more than 60 years of production. You would expect to find hundreds if Milorganite did cause the disease."

His records indicated that the greatest incidence of ALS is found with people who have experienced trauma to the body, including broken bones. "Football is a sport where trauma and broken bones are common. If you want something to pin the 49er's three cases of the disease on, pin it on the sport. We also found no record or recollection by the grounds crew that Milorganite was ever applied during the early 60s when the players used the field."

The Environmental Protection Agency sent an investigator to Milwaukee to review the evidence from both Brooks and Rimm. The conclusion of the investigator was that there was no connection between the product and the disease and that further investigation was not necessary.

"It's upsetting to see what unsubstantiated accusations can cause," says Rimm. "A number of ALS victims were preparing to sue the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission before the facts were presented. Sales of the product were unfairly impacted by the publicity."

It wasn't just sales of Milorganite that have been hurt by the negative publicity. "All sludge-based products have been hurt to some degree," says Hank Leibe of East Bay Mud in Oakland, CA. Leibe estimates that there are more than 200 producers of

sludge-based compost in the U.S. "Composts are a very safe and necessary way to solve a waste disposal problem in this country. Landfills for sludge are harder to find and higher in price. By mixing the sludge with an equal amount of wood chips or saw dust and composting the material, you get a biologically-safe product with a large number of benefits."

## SPORTS PRESS FEATURES SUPPLIER OF INFIELD MIX

Jim Kelsey, president of Partac Peat Corp., is getting used to calls from national publications and networks about his product, Beam Clay baseball infield mix. First, the Associated Press called. Then *Sports Illustrated*, CNN, CBS and NBC. The start of the professional baseball season had motivated sports reporters to find out more about this "special dirt" grounds managers talk about.

"Reporters seem fascinated with the idea that the dirt on the mound is different than the dirt at the plate and that's different from the base paths," said Kelsey. CNN taped and aired a three-minute spot about infield preparation. *Sports Illustrated* ran an item in May. "It seems to be snowballing," says Kelsey.

The attention started when Kelsey's hometown newspaper ran a feature on his

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