

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT



One thing that has bothered me throughout my years in the Green Industry is the charge that those who make and apply pesticides overlook their impact on the environment.

It irks me when newspaper and television reporters make blanket accusations about pesticides and those who apply them. Do they know more than the researchers who have spent years and millions of dollars determining the proper way to apply each pesticide to minimize risk? Have they ever read a pesticide label? Do they have any idea of the environ-

mental and economic benefit of these products? It seems in many cases the answer is no.

Perhaps what bothers me the most about these charges is a complete lack of regard for the applicator. I'm not talking about machines...I'm talking about people who have the responsibility of deciding whether the risk of using a particular pesticide is worth the benefit. I don't believe golf course superintendents and sports turf managers take this responsibility lightly.

The applicator's responsibility will grow in the 1990s. We have already seen the implementation of posting regulations by a number of states. This is bound to increase the number of questions you will be asked in the coming decade, so you should be prepared.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has been working with the Environmental Protection Agency during the past two years to supply superintendents with answers to many of these questions. Their findings provide scientific evidence that pesticides used on golf courses are not a threat to the safety of groundwater, golfers, or applicators when used by trained professionals according to label directions.

First of all, there is a huge difference between golf courses and agriculture when it comes to the fate of pesticides. Dense turf and its thatch create a natural barrier for pesticides. This prevents pesticides from entering water supplies and eliminates environmental damage resulting from erosion and stormwater runoff.

Dr. Thomas Watschke, turf specialist at Pennsylvania State University, has calculated that an average golf course of 150 acres absorbs 12 million gallons of water during a three-inch rainfall. In his research, Watschke discovered that thick, carefully maintained turfgrass has 15 times less runoff than a lower quality turf. As a result, almost all of the pesticides applied to turf remain in place after peak rainfall.

Dr. Harry Niemczyk from Ohio State University has found in pesticide fate studies that thatch intercepts up to 99 percent of pesticide residues in turf and accelerates the decomposition of many chemicals. Furthermore, Dr. Stuart Cohen, a pesticide residue specialist and former EPA team leader, reports that the pesticides labelled for use on golf courses are relatively low in toxicity, persistence, and mobility. He adds, "The use of pesticides on golf courses poses less of a threat to the nation's groundwater than does the agricultural use of pesticides."

The bottom line is, compared to farming or even residential land use, golf courses actually reduce total pollution loads to the environment. We will need to point this out repeatedly in the coming decade as each misinformed journalist, activist, or legislator captures the attention of the public.

To do this effectively, you must have the facts. If you have a question about pesticide use, ask your distributor or the manufacturer. Prepare yourself now for the questions that will come tomorrow.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

AUGUST

30

University of Rhode Island Turfgrass Field Day, Turfgrass Research Farm, Plains Rd., Kingston, RI. Contact: Dr. C.R. Skogley, University of Rhode Island, Plant Sciences Dept., Woodward Hall, Kingston, RI 02881.

SEPTEMBER

12-13

Virginia Tech Turfgrass Research Field Days, Turfgrass Research Center, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall III, (703) 231-9736.

18-21

43rd Northwest Turfgrass Conference and Exhibition, Sheraton Tacoma Hotel & Bicentennial Pavilion, Tacoma, WA. Contact: Blair Patrick, Northwest Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 1367, Olympia, WA 98507, (206) 754-0825.

19-21

Institute of Groundsmanship Sports & Leisure World Trade Exhibition, Windsor Racecourse, Windsor, England. Contact: Institute of Groundsmanship, 19-23 Church Street, The Agora, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, England MK12 5LG.

OCTOBER

4-6

Golf Course Europe 1989, Rhein/Main Halls, Wiesbaden, West Germany. Contact: Expoconsult, Toby M. Rijks, Straatweg 33, Box 200, 3600 AE, Maarssen, Holland, phone (03465) 73777 or FAX (03465) 73811.

8-11

Florida Turfgrass Annual Conference and Show, Curtiss Hixon Convention Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: Florida Turfgrass Association, 302 S. Graham Ave., Orlando, FL 32803-6332, (407) 898-6721.