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## FRONT LINES



### El Nino and Other Unpredictable Phenomena

By Dave Ashman

I recently attended a seminar where experts in the field of marine and atmospheric sciences evaluated the coastal impact of an El Nino winter for southern California. It was a very interesting discussion, and the information was well presented to an overflow crowd. Most of those attending were from municipalities, academia, coastal business centers and the sports turf community.

The media was well represented at the event. Cameras and roving reporters proved to be an overwhelming distraction for many in attendance. The lure of the cameras seduced many in the crowd to speak their minds on the El Nino issue.

#### 15 Seconds of Fame

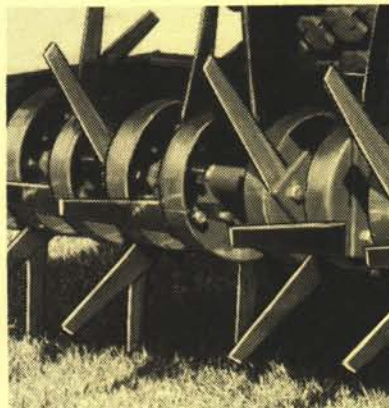
I believe it was Andy Warhol who gave us the often quoted "15 minutes of fame" line. Judging from the response of the crowd to the media, I would say it is now more like 15 seconds of fame — the length of time for a good sound bite on the evening news. People who are used to dealing with the media are usually extremely cautious with what they say. People who are not used to dealing with the media are usually petrified or babble like idiots. The crowd offered examples of each group.

Most of the speakers were extremely cautious with the media. One speaker was asked, "Will there be an El Nino winter for southern California?"

The learned orator thought for a second, then said, "The data is suggesting there will be a strong El Nino impact on the southland. I am not saying it — the data is saying it." Who collected the data? If he was unsure of

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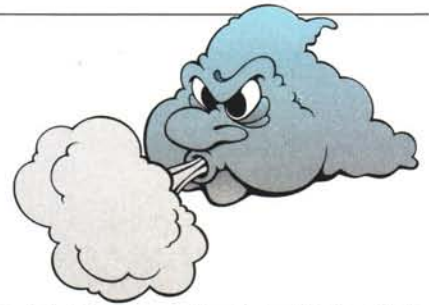
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# FRONT LINES

Front Lines Continued from pg 34

the data, why did he present it? This man sounded like a person testifying before a Senate subcommittee: "Senator, I can neither confirm nor deny the existence of any El Nino activities in the Pacific Theater."

The next speaker went to the other extreme, "Twelve of the 14 indicators of an El Nino winter are present today, and the government doesn't want you to know." The conspiracy theory is always an easily defensible position,



but linking your thesis to UFOs, Elvis sightings and grassy knolls may not be considered reliable.

There were many people who couldn't wait to offer their most profound thoughts on the matter. Most shared war stories of floods and devastation from previous El Nino winters. Listening to the stories, I couldn't help but think that these people are in leadership roles in their various communities. Is it a good idea to add to the media hype and share stories guaranteed to increase the anxiety of the people in the community? Maybe not.

The best group to watch were the people who had nothing relevant to say but offered what they perceived to be relevant. These are actual quotes:

"It doesn't matter how much Jell-O you put in the pool, you still can't walk on water."

"Always look in the oven before you turn it on."

"When you hear the toilet flush and the words 'uh, oh,' it's already too late."

What were these people thinking?

Despite distractions, this was an informative seminar on the El Nino winter. Will there be a strong El Nino influence this winter? The bottom line is that it is extremely difficult to predict the weather more than five days in advance. There is strong measurable and verifiable scientific evidence that conditions which lead to an El Nino winter are present today. It wouldn't hurt to prepare for the possibilities in a fiscally sound way. Do what you can afford and what will offer the best insurance for your operation. The quote of the day said it best, "You can play ball when the field is under water!"

If you have a story or anecdote you would like to share, call (562) 425-2449 or write it down (include your name and phone number) and mail it to Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Road, Long Beach, CA 90808.

## YOU COULD BE HONORED BY THE PROS!

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The Awards are sponsored by **Beam Clay®, sportsTURF magazine, and the Sports Turf Managers Assoc.,** in recognition of excellence and professionalism in maintaining outstanding, safe, professional quality baseball diamonds. Entries will be judged in three categories: professional diamonds; college diamonds; and school, municipal or park diamonds.

### Send the information below to enter:

1. Age of baseball diamond (year of installation).
2. Geographic location (city and state).
3. Description of maintenance program.
4. Operating budget for baseball diamond.
5. Irrigation: None \_\_\_\_\_ Manual \_\_\_\_\_ Automatic \_\_\_\_\_
6. Total number of maintenance staff for field.
7. Does baseball field have lighting for night games?
8. Number of events on baseball diamond per year.
9. Types and number of events on diamond other than baseball?
10. How many months during the year is the field used?
11. Why you think this field is one of the best?
12. **IMPORTANT:** Send two sets of color slides or prints.

**Deadline for entries:** Entries must be postmarked no later than November 30. Selection of winners will be made by the Awards Committee of Four Major League Head Groundskeepers.

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