

PESTICIDE LEGISLATION AND THE GOLF CLUB

THE 1985 Food and Environment Act is aimed at protecting health and safeguarding our environment, but there appears to be a loophole through which private golf clubs escape this legislation, or so they think!

After a paper I gave recently on health and safety, many greenkeepers told me that either their clubs have refused to listen or discuss their position, or, worse still, some head greenkeepers insist that these problems are nothing to do with their duties.

However, if our profession is to achieve its rightful place in the golf world, we must address ourselves to these problems. We can no longer accept the 'head in the sand' attitudes of the majority of golf clubs in this country today. The act's implications are, or should be, of concern to us all.

In a recent turf magazine, I read the totally misleading comment that the act was nothing to do with golf clubs - rubbish! Every time any 'pesticide' is used on a course, great harm can occur, either to the operator, public or environment if efficient calibration and/or application is not carried out.

The term 'pesticide,' by the way, refers not only to pesticides, but fungicides, herbicides and, surprisingly, wood preservers.

One immediate effect the act has on a golf club is the presence of an illegal product such as DDT - this will lead to a large fine. The supply and use of protective clothing, masks, gloves, boots and spray suits is very basic management, but how many clubs supply them and how many greenkeepers use them?

Many committees have a simplistic view of work carried out on the course. They constantly relate to what they do to their lawns and seem to think that golf course management is a lot of fuss about nothing. Education is again the key - education of club staff and officers is vital.

As we have found in the past, far too many clubs are totally apathetic when it comes to encouraging greenkeeper training



By Peter Wisbey, course manager at North Foreland Golf Club, Kent.

and it is my experience that when any sort of educational activity takes place, be it a seminar, trade talk or visit, or simply a few greenkeepers walking a course and exchanging views and ideas, you see the same faces and the same clubs represented time after time.

Returning to the 1985 act, codes of practice are now available concerning the use and storage of pesticides. All head greenkeepers and course managers should obtain copies from the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. These codes contain a wealth of information with which we should familiarise ourselves.

The code on storage is of particular use, with details on construction, siting (away from drains or watercourses) and the safety aspect with reference to emergency vehicles, access, etc. It should be a matter of professional pride to have clean and organised storage of all the requisites in regular use on the course. The old adage: 'show me a greenkeeper's sheds and I'll tell you what the course is like' is a very true one.

The new act has far-reaching implications, enforceable by law, for agriculture, local authorities and contractors. One important aspect is the testing and certification of operators, which will be carried out by the National Proficiency Tests Council based at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh. Although golf clubs

cannot be forced to put staff through such an examination, I feel strongly that clubs should voluntarily send senior staff to sit it.

One aspect of both the 1985 Food and Environment Act and the Health and Safety at Work Act puzzles me when related to private golf clubs. As I have already stated, the law appertaining to agriculture, etc, is clear. But a farmer spraying a field is unlikely to encounter members of the public. On a golf course, however, spraying takes place, on occasions, around play, with all the obvious risks that entails.

As far as the Health and Safety at Work Act is concerned, there is a similar anomaly. A farmer, again working in the same field as before, has to have his tractor fitted with a safety frame. On the golf course, this cannot be enforced by law. I don't think anyone would argue that there is a much greater chance of overturning a tractor while mowing an undulating fairway than working in a relatively flat field.

I feel the powers-that-be should address themselves to this ridiculous situation.

In conclusion, although I have only briefly touched upon details of the 1985 act, which could fill a number of magazines (again, I urge you to obtain copies of the codes of practice), I cannot stress enough the need for us all to approach these subjects in a serious and professional manner.

Committees are made up of businessmen used to dealing with facts and figures. Approached in the proper manner, with all the relevant information to hand, a positive response can be forthcoming. Check on the insurance implication of improper storage and third party cover for members and visitors. Storage in an adequate building or container need not be all that expensive. Keep records of stock, dates and amounts used, operator, results, etc.

Above all, don't give up and say: "My club won't listen." Make them. In the long run, they may thank you for your persistence.