Who would have thought that the demise of chlordane would have caused so many problems for the greenkeeper?

Chlordane's only crime was to be a persistent organo-chlorine compound and as such was part of MAFF determination to phase out such substances. No evidence was presented that it was more harmful than was already known and, when handled according to directions, it gave excellent control of worms in fine turf. Its persistence was such that operator contact was limited to a span of once every three years. In COSHH terms this would have made chlordane the preferred substance as 'an engineering control'.

Not to worry, they said, now we have Carbaryl in a flowable formulation, which gives good control and is not so persistent in the soil. Carbaryl has the same broad classification as chlordane (both are listed 'Harmful'), but to give the equivalent degree of control as chlordane it needs annual applications and on some soils more than one application was needed. This means a higher degree of exposure to an organo-phosphorus compound for which there is an HSE Guidance Note MS 17 - 'Biological Monitoring of Workers Exposed to Organophosphorus Compounds'.

The flowable formulations worked well enough providing they were applied in the right conditions and at the right water volume - eg. a minimum of 1,000 litres per hectare, (more than 100 gallons per acre in old money!). We were resigned to the fact that this was to become the standard treatment for worms: after all, this is in line with the current thinking on changing to the use of less persistent substances in general.

The new products have hardly touched the shelves of our stores when we learn that the supply of flowable formulations are to cease due to 'supply difficulties' from the EC manufacturer, who it seems has been recently acquired by Rhone Poulenc. And... surprise, surprise, a new wormkiller product is launched at IOG by Rhone Poulenc! Not a flowable formulation but a wettable powder, taking us back more than 20 years to the days of powder formulations. We were resigned to the fact that the new powder formulation would be discard in favour of the liquid; but we must not look back. Is this progress?

No-one can accuse Greenkeeper International of blindly taking sides, although we are certainly not above taking a firm stand on issues that concern the well-being of the greenkeeper or his golf course. Thus we invited the manufacturers mentioned in Jon Allbutt's article, Rhone Poulenc, to offer their side of the equation. Here is their reply:

We believe there are a number of factual errors in the material. Our response, however, will be restricted to the main points relating to our products.

It was surprising for us to read that 'Twister' is the sole worm control product available. This is totally incorrect, as Rhone-Poulenc market three products for worm control in turf.

'Tcastaway Plus', the original formulation of which was launched as far back as 1984, is as readily available today as it has been for some years. It is a flowable formulation and is held in high esteem by a large number of turf care professionals, offering as it does long term control of worms and leatherjackets.

Rhone-Poulenc launched 'Twister' as a wettable powder to increase the available choice of products. To help minimise handling a specially designed measuring beaker is included with each box of the product. Rhone-Poulenc think it is important that they give turf care professionals the option of being able to use a contact acting product and 'Twister's' contact action gives quick control of problem worms on playing surfaces ranging from sports fields to greens.

To round off this response, Rhone-Poulenc would like to point out that a third worm control product was launched at the IOG exhibition in September. 'CDA Castaway Plus', a flowable product, gives worm control at an application rate of 10 litres per hectare and when applied with a Lancelot CDA lance fitted with the new Rhone-Poulenc bleed valve, requires no mixing, is used straight from the bottle, and can be applied directly to the problem area. It reduces handling, saves time and is a major advance in terms of novel application technique.

In conclusion, Rhone-Poulenc feel it is important that greenkeepers are provided with a wide range of products in order that they may select the best application for their situation.

Austin Davies, Product Manager, Rhone Poulenc

As the British greenkeeper struggles to keep down the nuisance of the earthworm, and to illustrate the difference in greenkeeping methods and principles between the USA and the UK, an article in the most recent issue of the USGA Green Section Record, written by a Professor of Entomology in Kentucky, offers an alternative viewpoint by extolling the virtues of the earthworm and suggesting they should be encouraged, as they reduce thatch. Aeration and sensible management to ensure thatch-free turf is not mentioned.

Now we read (Daily Telegraph, November 13th) that 1.5 million earthworms are to be imported at a cost of £70,000 from Holland (no one seems to be harvested in Britain, though in Holland there appears to be a thriving night-time worm catching industry) to improve the top soil over what was once a rubbish tip, on the Stockley Park golf course adjacent to Heathrow Airport designed by Robert Trent Jones.

Within three years the worms are expected to have multiplied 30-fold and when the course is handed over to Hillington council for public use in 1993, the worms will be turning thick and fast. Then, no doubt, the greenkeeper will find the worms and their wretched casts a damned nuisance and find the task of elimination made doubly difficult by the aforementioned restrictions on chlordane.