Approved or not approved?
The pesticides registration muddle

by JON ALLBUTT

Agronomists, advisers, employers and users beware, the product you are recommending or proposing to use may not be approved any more.

Some of our favourite products may not be around much longer. A combination of the MAFF review process and in-house reviews of commercial viability by the approval holders is resulting in many products being discontinued. Inevitably there will be misguided reporting of this in the media, which does not help to clarify what is a very confusing situation.

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides has the power to recommend to Ministers that products be withdrawn (have their approvals revoked) on safety grounds. The registration process also requires regular updating of data packages, labels, container design etc. The cost of all this to the approval holder is sometimes prohibitive and the decision may be to discontinue the product, as sales do not support any further work.

To report all this in terms of ‘another product banned’ is irresponsible and only serves to further confuse. The most recent edition of the official listing of approvals and withdrawals – ‘The Pesticide Register’ – is written for those who already understand ‘the system’ and can read the formal technical language. The fact that a popular product appears in the list of withdrawals might only mean that the approval holder is disposing of an old approval, having previously improved the product by a minor formulation change – which requires registration and thus another approval number. Confused? – you will be! The Pesticides Register is not the best place to look unless you are an expert.

If you are giving advice on the use of pesticides you should hold a BASIS Certificate and be on the BASIS Professional Register. This requires that you agree to undertake annual Continuous Professional Development in order to maintain your registration. Those seeking advice which will include the use of pesticides should make sure the advisor is up to date and is on the BASIS Professional Register.

When it comes to reviewing your use of pesticides under the COSHH Regulations and you are updating your inventory, consult your supplies representative, distributor or manufacturer in order to establish that the product approval is on-going.

I am constantly hearing comments from greenkeepers that such and such a product has been banned, hasn’t it? A case of the grapevine not working well for once!

■ The author and consultant advisor, Jon Allbutt, is a member of the Register of Practitioners for Pesticide Advice under categories that include Amenity Horticulture, Forestry and Aquatic.