

What's Up with Weed Control?

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

After Illoxan came out in the late 1990s to provide a new weapon for goosegrass control and Basagran and Manage were rolled out to battle the sedges, it seems like there has been a long gap in new weed-control products other than the controversial clopyralid (Lontrel) for broadleaf control. Users who did not follow the label and let clippings of treated grass get into municipal compost operations caused the problem. Meanwhile we have relied so heavily for so long on MSMA for grassy weed control; perhaps the recent concerned focus on arsenic levels in golf course soils stirred the pot and hastened new products in the pipeline. Maybe they just needed a nudge.

Whatever the cause, Revolver and Monument have debuted recently and, according to two of the articles below, have proven to be effective weapons and can replace MSMA in some cases. One holdout that still seems to respond only to MSMA is tropical signalgrass. Sure hope the scientists are working on an alternative. The makers of MSMA are still negotiating with EPA and Florida DEP to do a study to prove that MSMA is not a problem for arsenic loading in the soil, but the jury is still out on the successful defense of the product. Don't be surprised to see some label changes in the near future.

Just to restate some of the obvious trends that will be evident in the articles below and echoed in the cover story on St. James Bay, the days of large-scale boom spraying are over. There may be some isolated cases of course renovation and cleanup after years of neglect where large-area boom-spraying may be required, but the trademark of responsible pest management is spot spraying.

Over the past 10 years, the business and environmental climates have forced superintendents be more frugal and sensitive to the environments they manage. Consequently less material is being applied and only where needed.

From the manufacturing side, products are becoming targeted to specific weeds. While that may drive up one aspect of the cost of weed control, the amount of active ingredient required is smaller,

helping to offset the cost. Some courses are resorting to consistent, gradual hand-pulling of obvious weeds.

If you are using less MSMA and 2,4,D, make a note of that fact. Document your chemical use, especially if you are using less overall. This is a good story and needs to be shared with our regulators and legislators. From my travels, it appears to be the trend, but I don't want to generalize. Now read on for current weed control programs at three Florida courses.

Keeping it Simple at Seminole

At the Seminole Golf Club we try to follow strong agronomic practices such as proper fertility and irrigation to keep the bermudagrass as healthy as possible, thus reducing weed intrusion and the need for chemicals for weed control. My worst weed problems have come either from over-irrigation or weak bermudagrass turf. As a result, 90 percent of our current weed control is hand-spraying post-emergent herbicides, or hand-cutting and -pulling bigger weeds such as goosegrass.

The only time we really boom-spray for weeds is during the summer when the golf season is over, mainly because of the potential for discoloration of the turf and, of course, most of our weeds are more active that time of year. We do not use pre-emergent weed control because of our strong post-emergent control program.

For the first time, we now have a full-time chemical technician who works only on weed and insect control. This has almost eliminated the need for boom spraying and pre-emergent control at Seminole.

We use the following products:

- 1) Broadleaf weeds - Lesco 3 way, Quicksilver and Manor (for spurge)
- 2) Grassy weeds - MSMA, Illoxan
- 3) Sedges - Basagran, Manage

We have experimented with Monument but have seen no great advantage over the products mentioned previously. Again, the key for us has been to keep the turf healthy and constantly "spot spray" or cut out weeds, which reduces the use of herbicides. We try to keep our weed control as simple as possible.

*Hal Hicks, Superintendent
Seminole Golf Club*

Good for the Goose, Good for the Sedge

Goosegrass was the No. 1 weed problem when I arrived four years ago, but we started an aggressive weed pulling program which I feel was very helpful in removing future seeds. Then we started spot-spraying with MSMA and Sencor in a

15-gal. sprayer. At the same time we applied Ronstar at 2 lb. of active ingredient per acre in January, April and October. This has really worked well for us.

I did try a fourth application in the summer twice and did not think it was cost effective.

Currently our two biggest weed problems are crabgrass and the sedges. We are using Monument on sedges with fantastic results, and MSMA on the crabgrass. The areas of sedge infestation are large enough right now to use a boom sprayer but that should change as we get a better control of the problem.

We are using a 15-gal. electric sprayer for spot-treating the crabgrass. This year we also used Monument in the rough on some goose grass with very good results. The chipping green also had large areas of goosegrass that got out of control after the hurricanes this year. I used Monument on the Tidwarf for these areas and saw no damage to the 'Dwarf and had excellent control of the goosegrass.

*Michael Carver, Superintendent
Monarch Country Club*

Timing is Everything

Revolver is great for goosegrass, but it may require two, three or, in some cases, four applications to really get the goosegrass under control, especially in heavily infested areas. Timing is critical to be successful. I made a second application 10 days after the initial application. Generally this will kill the mature weeds.

For heavily infested areas, third and fourth applications at 10-12-day intervals may be needed to control juvenile plants springing up from the germinating seed bank in the soil as long as the weather is favorable for germination. A little lower rate will work in the follow-up applications because you'll be going after the seedlings. Again timing is the most important thing using Revolver. Goosegrass is tough and loves heavy traffic areas, so you need to be aggressive with the turf you have, and try to cultivate a healthy turf cover to prevent infestation.

Revolver also took out *Poa annua* in bermudagrass very well, but *Poa* seed can lie dormant for years so problem areas will probably need multiple applications over the years.

I did a test study for Syngenta before Monument was labeled for the U.S. It works great on all of the sedges and kyllinga. It seemed to eliminate the sedges after two applications, where as Basagran and Manage seemed to do as well on the root systems. Monument gave longer control and it also worked well on taking out unwanted *paspalum* in bermudagrass. It is also labeled for torpedograss

MSMA vs. Arsenic: The Facts

MSMA is an organic herbicide that has been used safely and performed reliably for over 40 years. Its toxicity and behavior in the environment have been studied extensively. All studies have shown that there are no significant health effects associated with MSMA, and that it does not pose risk to the environment.

The molecule of MSMA contains arsenic just like the molecule of water (H₂O) contains hydrogen and oxygen, or the molecule of table salt (NaCl) contains sodium and chlorine. Arsenic, like hydrogen and chlorine, can be dangerous in certain forms and not in others.

There are two groups of arsenic compounds – organic and inorganic. Organic compounds of arsenic are those in which a carbon atom (C) is bound to the arsenic atom (As). MSMA is an organic compound of arsenic. Organic arsenic compounds are less prevalent in nature and are 10 to 100 times less toxic than inorganic compounds. They are much less toxic to aquatic organisms, are not mutagenic, and unlikely to be carcinogenic to humans.

Arsenic is a ubiquitous element occurring nearly everywhere on earth as a component of soils and natural rock formations. The common form in nature is inorganic arsenic and hence the term “arsenic” usually refers to the inorganic form. Long-term exposure to inorganic arsenic can cause health problems.

The carbon-arsenic bond found in organic arsenic is stable under a variety of environmental conditions, thus it is highly resistant to chemical degradation. A small number of soil micro-organisms are capable of metabolizing MSMA via cleavage of the carbon-arsenic bond, to form inorganic arsenate. However, conditions in field soils are unfavorable for these processes. If small amounts of inorganic arsenicals are released through this process they are rapidly inactivated in soils by forming insoluble salts of iron and aluminum.

Inorganic compounds are used in the glass and ceramic industries and as feed additives for poultry and swine. Arsenic trioxide (As₂O₃), the most important commercial arsenic compound, is produced as a byproduct of the smelting process of copper and lead ores. Inorganic arsenic compounds are no longer used in agriculture because of their toxicity. Organic compounds of arsenic, including MSMA, are

used in agriculture, forestry and turfgrass management as pesticides and herbicides.

The greatest portion, by far, of applied MSMA binds to soil particles in the top-most layers of the soil. Most soils have been shown to have extensive capacity to trap and hold organic arsenicals tenaciously, so they are not dislodged through the soils by natural flow of water from irrigation or rainfall. In fact, when performing soil analysis in the laboratory, rigorous digestion processes (i.e. digestion in strong acids at high temperatures for a day or two) are required to remove the bound arsenic from soil particles. Such processes never happen in the natural environment. This binding or “sorption” acts as a scavenging mechanism, preventing MSMA residues from leaching into underlying groundwater. Proper application of MSMA is not likely to cause leaching of organic arsenical residues in a wide range of soil types.

In conclusion, MSMA is a nontoxic organic compound that has been safely used as a highly effective broad-spectrum herbicide for grassy weeds for over 40 years without risk to human health or the environment.

(Editor's note: The facts and statements above were taken from fact sheets supplied by the MAA (MethaneArsonic Acid) Task Force (MAATF). The Problem: The only way to test for arsenic in the field samples is to measure total arsenic. The samples are put through the rigorous “un-natural” laboratory digestion process and the arsenic amounts do not specify where the arsenic came from (soil, water, fertilizer, mulch, rock or herbicide or previous human activity). The state says it currently must regulate by total arsenic levels. In some previous studies, samples from mix/load sites were combined with random samples on the golf courses thus confusing the results of normal use accumulations versus a more controllable mix/load location. The MSMA manufacturers are currently working with Florida regulators to conduct specific tests to see if the normal use of MSMA does pose a risk to the environment. If you have any questions regarding the use of MSMA or want more information, you can contact Dr. Michal Eldan, Ph.D. at MAATF, P. O. Box 33856, Washington, D.C., 20033-0856. Phone: (800) 890-3301; Fax: (901) 761-9477; Email: meldan@luxpam.com

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but I prefer Drive at 0.5 oz. in 5 gallons of water. It doesn't burn the bermuda. Multiple applications will be needed. Torpedograss is a real tough one to control.

Tropical signalgrass is also a tough customer to deal with. I use MSMA at 2.25 pints/acre tank mixed with Sencor at 0.25 oz./acre with a spreader-sticker. This mix is applied on roughs mowed at 1.5 inch height and up.

When spraying tee tops and fairways, we apply the same products at two-thirds the previous rate. Second and third applications will be needed. Timing again is important. Use a 7- to 10-day interval between applications, not 7 to 11 days.

When mixing small quantities for spot spraying, the DEP people and some labels require 0.5 ounces of MSMA per five gallons of water. This just doesn't work.

(Editor's note: When you break down the ratio of MSMA (2.25 pints = 40 ounces) in a 100-gallon tank, it comes to 2 ounces of MSMA per 5 gallons of water. There seems to be a conflict concerning boom application and hand spraying concentration of MSMA in a given square foot.)

For broadleaf weeds I typically use Lesco Three-way, Trimec Southern formula, and Pro-Source Strike Three at 0.75 oz./gal. for spot spraying, and no more than 40 oz./acre with a good surfactant if using a boom sprayer. Again timely repeat applications at 7-10 days have to be done or you're just throwing money away.

As far as equipment, I use 2-gal. pump-ups and 15-20-gal. electric sprayers. I also have a small 10-foot boom sprayer calibrated to 30 gal/acre and pull it behind a cart and use it where I can.

I think the boom sprayer has been a valuable tool. You can cover in an hour what would take someone all day to spot spray. For those concerned about over-spraying beyond a solitary target

weed, I feel that with the small boom you are taking out small immature weed seedlings not readily visible, especially in chronically infested areas.

Royal Poinciana is more than 30 years old. Weed control will be an ongoing program. You just have to stay with it and have some good guys or gals who like their jobs and don't let it get to you. With a good timing program, you'll get great results. Remember to follow all of the Personal Protection Equipment requirements on the product label.

Ken McCalister

IPM Manager, Royal Poinciana Golf Club

Q&A with Jim Walker, Greynolds Park G.C.

What is your No. 1 weed problem at a high-traffic municipal golf course, and how do you manage it?

Our biggest challenge is goosegrass. We apply Barricade at the label rate in October and February. We spot treat with a MSMA and Sencor mix for any weeds that break through.

Do you do any boom spraying these days or is it all spot treatments?

The only time we use a boom is for treating large patches of sedge.

Last year there was a lot of discussion about MSMA on golf course and the debate continues. What has been your approach?

We have reduced our overall use of MSMA 90 percent. As I said earlier, we only spot-treat using a 15-gal. electric sprayer to limit the treated area.

Have you tried some of the new products like Revolver?

We tried it once, but had poor results.

Anything else?

Well, we mechanically remove (hand-pull) weeds from tee tops, collars and fairways or obvious weeds anywhere. I use a paint brush to dab on MSMA on signalgrass. It's the only product currently on the market that will touch it.