Ground water studies positive for golf

BY PETER BLAIS

Those in the golf business tend to view their industry as very positive for the environment. Unfortunately many others don’t see it that way, especially regarding ground water contamination by pesticides, according to Richard Cooper, Ph.D., a University of Massachusetts researcher who spoke at February’s GCSAA annual conference in Orlando.

There have been 26 documented cases of pesticides found in ground water in New England, although none have been associated with golf courses, said Cooper.

But the average person doesn’t distinguish between agricultural pesticides (the most common source of ground water contamination) and turf management pesticides used on golf courses. Increasingly it’s the superintendent’s job to serve as industry spokesman and explain those differences.

To help the superintendent better perform this new role, Cooper reviewed some of the basic facts about turfgrass and the results of recent studies regarding pesticide contamination.

Golf course turf provides a very dense plant population, between 1,500 and 2,000 plants per square foot in the rough rising to 3,500 to 4,000 on the green.

“Grass plants intercept most, if not all pesticides before they reach ground water. That’s a very important difference compared to agricultural plants like corn, soybeans, etc.,” Cooper said.

Thatch, the layer of decomposing matter below the growing grass, is a strong absorber of pesticides. Thatch is common under turf but not agricultural plants.

Grass also has a deep and extensive root system that can reach down several feet. Roots both absorb and adsorb pesticides.

“The nature of the turfgrass community is that it helps protect the environment,” said Cooper. That’s why the Soil Conservation Service has long recommended a grass buffer strip be planted near supplies, they get there in one of two ways — runoff or leaking.

Recent studies at Pennsylvania State University and the University of Rhode Island showed that runoff from turf is not a common event. It takes rain on the order of four to six inches per hour or frozen soil to get pesticide movement through runoff.

“Instead of polluting the environment, we can make a strong case that golf courses protect the environment.”

By Peter Blaism

Mechanics

Continued from page 36

January or February would be fine."

• Discuss appropriate topics at appropriate places. “Someone once suggested having an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) representative come by. No superintendent was crazy about hosting a meeting that could uncover a violation and $25,000 fine.”

• Don’t use meetings simply as a bitch session. “If you have problems, have a discussion. Try to do it in a positive manner.”

• Don’t discuss salaries at every meeting. “Schedule a meeting where salaries and benefits are the topics. Everyone attending should be expected to verbally participate. That way you have the facts rather than rumor. Superintendents have been doing it for a long time.”

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