Dr. Jackson: Fungicides to remain important tool for superintendents

By Peter Blais

FALMOUTH, Maine — Despite advances in cultural practices and biological controls, fungicides will remain an important tool in fighting turfgrass diseases. University of Rhode Island Professor Noel Jackson told a recent gathering of Maine superintendents that turf management specialist the past 34 years and one of this year's winners of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Distinguished Service Award, Dr. Jackson and two colleagues at URI recently received a three-year United States Golf Association grant to study mycorrhizal fungi. Endophytic fungi present in the aerial parts of some grasses make them resistant to certain leaf-feeding insects. It is possible mycorrhizal fungi also confer benefits to turfgrasses, especially in situations of low fertility, water and phosphorous. The URI study will address issues, Jackson said. Despite widespread use of cultural control practices, golf courses still largely depend on pesticides, particularly fungicides, Jackson said.

The turfgrass industry is the No. 1 user of fungicide dollars used in this country in 1987. That's more than peanuts, grapes, pome fruits, nuts or rice, which is active in all aspects of research and testing new grass varieties.

Retired from UMass in 1988, Troll remains active in turfgrass studies.

“Most of the problems I’m asked to address relate to fungal diseases,” Jackson said. “There are many agents that hurt turf, but major devastation is usually caused by fungi. That’s why fungicides are essential.”

“Disease-causing fungi can never be eliminated completely. What you hope to do is keep the populations down. You do that with a program of judicious spraying while manipulating the cultural techniques you know are also instrumental in reducing those populations. Essentially this is an integrated turf management approach.”

“Just turf maintenance levels on superior golf courses are so intensive that you can’t get away without the use of chemical control agents. The more intensive the management, the more stressed and vulnerable the grasses become. The increasing conversion of fairways to bermudagrass and the constant clamor for faster greens will only entail more reliance on fungicides.”

Unfortunately, the use of chemicals upsets the public. Anything that has been even remotely linked to cancer, or any other human ailment, is fair game for environmentalists, Jackson said.

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Green Section honors retired Prof. Troll

He is general chairman of the Massachusetts Turf Conference, one of the largest assemblies of golf course superintendents and turfgrass personnel in the country, and has assisted the Northeastern Region of the USGA Green Section in its turf advisory service visits.

He received the Distinguished Service Award from the GCSA in 1983. One nomination said: “Dr. Troll uses every opportunity to promote golf, and especially the golf superintendent...”

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The award, established in 1961, recognizes distinguished service to golf through work with turfgrass. During his tenure at the University of Massachusetts, an estimated 1,100 students graduated from the program he directed. A majority became golf course superintendents.

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