Scientists put pesticide lobby's arguments to rest

By Mark Leslie

Sparing no time responding to an environmental coalition's call for quick and hard-hitting pesticide laws in Ontario, a Canadian green industry organization has published a scientific document that critiques and disproves many of the coalition's statements.

Thorn Charters, a director of Green Care Horticultural Association, said "A Scientific Response to the Urban Anti-Pesticide Lobby" has been distributed to each of its 20 superintendent, turfgrass and lawn care-related member organizations and Green Care is fielding requests for additional copies.

But despite the document's significant refutations to statements made by the Urban Pesticide Caucus (UPC), the response has been meager, Charters said.

Charters said executive summaries from the Green Care report were sent to 2,500 members of the media, who were offered the entire report. "Yet, we have only six or seven requests," Charters said. "That tells me the media will take what they're spoon-fed, but if it requires any effort they won't bother."

Charters also said people in the golf industry are not even responding to the available information. "A lot of people in our business say, 'This is crazy, they're doing what they shouldn't be doing,' but they don't do anything about it... Public perception is beginning to overwhelm people. They would rather not discuss the issues in public," he said.

Written by three scientists with Ecological Services for Planning Ltd. of Guelph, Ontario, the Green Care booklet is a "must addendum" to any letter the association sends out bringing "irresponsible stories to people's attention," Charters said.

The report added: "There is a major concern that the majority of the information sources are biased towards the anti-pesticide lobby. The UPC has cited 78 sources in its document. Of these sources, there are 36 journal articles. Eighteen of these are from the Journal of Pesticide Reform, which is not a peer-reviewed scientific journal and could not be located by University of Guelph and University of Waterloo library searches."

Of the remaining eight journal articles, the information from three, which was checked, was taken out of context or interpreted in such a fashion as to support the opinion of the UPC. Many of the remaining sources (i.e. Canadian Environmental Law Association, Friends of the Earth, National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, and Pollution Probe) are from groups which support the views of the UPC and do not necessarily present the weight of the scientific evidence. Furthermore, these groups do not conduct scientific research."

"A Scientific Response to the Urban Anti-Pesticide Lobby" is available for $10 from Green Care Horticultural Association, 34 Lambeth Road, Islington, Ontario M9A 2V7.