Mispaced concern drives EPA regulatory policy

The ultimate fate of America's golfing public was relegated to secondary importance when Dr. Burdette Kuykendall made a recent presentation of his GCSAA-commissioned Mortality Study last month in Dallas.

Kuykendall, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Iowa, reported that, historically, golf course superintendents have been more likely to contract certain types of cancer than the general public. And while he stressed there is no proven causal relationship between superintendents' exposure to pesticides, he stated rather definitively that golfers — or course "patrons" — are in no way at risk.

This is more than a surprise to industry members in the Dallas audience, but it also struck golf courses what ironic because pesticide policy — as issued by the federal EPA and various state agencies — is almost completely driven by the perceived effects of chemical exposure on the public at large, not superintendents. In a culture where most golf balls seem to carry more popular wealth than the preponderance of scientific data, it was refreshing to hear Kuykendall dispel an all-too-pervasive myth, namely, that pesticide use poses a threat to the general welfare. What's more, he noted that it poses a threat to superintendents is not clear, which is why the GCSAA, chemical manufacturers and the golf course industry all support further study.

Most everyone acknowledges that chemical handling practices were woefully insufficient during the 1940s, '50s and '60s, when subjects of the Mortality Study — those GCSAA members who died between 1970 and 1992 — tended to support courses. Further, most everyone agrees that manufacturers have corrected above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to applicator training, specific labeling and environmental labeling. The 10 years of research which any product must undergo before EPA approval speak for themselves. The new GCSAA leadership did the right thing by addressing the study pro-actively. Quickly releasing the story to news organizations, soliciting research which any product must undergo before EPA approval, asked by Sumbol to replicate a par-3 hole on all the Jones Trail courses in Alabama. 

Held down: Best-looking couple in the business is Bob and Christine Faulk of Greensnix. 

No copycats here: "I don't know how people can copy golf holes. It's impossible. We couldn't even copy our own," said Bob. "I just finished reading your guest editorial in Golf Course News (January 1994 issue) and either you or I are very badly informed.

You specifically indicated that golf courses use four to seven times more pesticides than farms. But how about compared to a home lawn, vegetable garden or even the White House Rose Gardens and grounds?"

You also indicated the increased sensitivity of children who walk golf courses, and pesticide runoff that can severely threaten drinking water supplies. Is the basis of highlighting those issues to inform or inflame?

I applaud any aggressive environmental advocate with a strong earth science background (Ph.D in plant and soil scientists) who stays in tune with all golf course-related issues and incidents. Yet I have no knowledge of any incidents you allude to, at least within the five years. Therefore, I would appreciate it if a member of your staff could specifically cite proven examples such as you mention. If your staff finds no such incident, then I think it would be appropriate for you to so state in another guest editorial. Frankly, the action plan of your letter reads like something from the mid-1980s, for golf courses and turf managers have been doing what you support.

We in the golf course industry pride ourselves on being the leaders, and not followers, in this current green revolution. I can provide you with stories of recent research findings, including those from the EPA's Cape Cod study, that support my point and vindicate our course goals.

I would expect a person of your leadership position to be rather open-minded and deliberate about how you may pronounce as an administrator of the EPA. I would further expect you to be more like the blind scales of justice, weighing proven evidence and data with the goal of implementing long-term protection of earth, rather than simply distributing outdated, unsubstantiated advocacy rhetoric. For the sake of science and future generations who depend upon us, let us deal in fact and not scare propaganda.

I look forward to your answer, for if the communication folks of the turf industry are covering up severe or significant environmental degradation or incidents, they need to be taken to task.

As a passenger and parent on this spaceship, I want to know if my colleagues are capable of mistakes or are acting in an irresponsible manner. These issues are far too serious to generalize about or cover up. Likewise, if we are doing something we deserve some recognition and praise.

I am clearly concerned, not just about the perception of golf courses in the environmental continuum, but also the reality of our role. I know of a multitude of positive impacts, and I want to work on reducing, not exacerbating, the negative ones, but we must be specific.

Please contact me if I can further assist you.

Michael J. Hurdzan, president National Golf Foundation Columbus, Ohio

Letters

HURDZAN ANSWERS EPA CHIEF

Michael J. Hurdzan, who heads Hurdzan Golf Course Design, Inc., in Columbus, Ohio, sent Golf Course News this copy of his letter to EPA Administrator Carol N. Browner.

Dear Ms. Browner:

I just finished reading your guest editorial in Golf Course News (January 1994 issue) and either you or I are very badly informed. You specifically indicated that golf courses use four to seven times more pesticides than farms. But how about compared to a home lawn, vegetable garden or even the White House Rose Gardens and grounds?

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Michael J. Hurdzan, president National Golf Foundation Columbus, Ohio

BROWNER'S EPA FACTOIDS

To the editor:

The January issue of Golf Course News contained a puzzling juxtaposition of factoids, enviro-political trends and scientific research. Scientific research, of course, finishes third in that lineup.

Factoids, as the late Dixie Lee Ray said, are false, exaggerated or misleading beliefs which gain acceptance by frequent repetition. Golfer must learn to recognize and, as Byron Nelson said: "It's impossible. We cannot live that day. We cannot prove evidence and data with one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes. 

Hurdzan invokes the links: Hearing a long-winded congratulatory letter from President Clinton, Old Tom Morris Award-winner Byron Nelson said: "It goes on and on, doesn't it? If he keeps writing like that, I might have too many colleagues next time."

Factoids remedy, bring on the TV cameras: Ron Dodson, president of the Audubon Society of New York: "We can deal with factoids with Preparation F."

Continued on page 13

GOLF COURSE NEWS
value created for property building the golf course but not consideration now is given to resulting from costs incurred in received by the golf course. Better income models and units of comparison have been developed as the real estate appraisal profession has learned how to work mutually with the golf industry to better understand golf properties. Of the three commonly recognized approaches to value, by far the income approach yields a value conclusion most reflective of market behavior because most golf properties are purchased as income-producing investments. This should be given utmost attention. Are rates, fees and round counts accurate? Are operating expenses consistent with the market? Is the rate of return consistent with appropriate economic factors? These, along with other questions, must be adequately answered to develop a value for the property. While the sales comparison and cost approaches can also provide accurate value indications, the income approach usually reflects market behavior most accurately. Assuming that a value conclusion has been developed, we realize that this includes income from and value attributed to items such as food and beverage sales, pro shop revenues, golf carts and other personal property and business items not directly attributable to the land and improvements (real estate). These items cannot be assessed as real estate and must be extracted from the overall value to produce a value conclusion for the real estate.

Real estate taxes often can amount to an expense in excess of $100,000 for golf properties and the author has seen assessments of more than double the property value. When capitalized, this potential tax savings can result in a substantial increase to your golf course's bottom line as well as an increase in the value realized from the property upon any future sale.

Pursuing a fair assessment will offer a number of challenges: First, as a golf course (or especially a private club) you will be an easy target. This means that you should have as much information supporting your appeal as possible and that your consultants be experienced experts in golf property valuation and tax assessment consulting and litigation. Secondly, you may be in a state which has assessment laws and procedures which might preclude the valuation from being done in the most accurate and technically correct manner. Third, any estimate of personal property and business value is subject to close scrutiny because there are no techniques for valuing them which have been universally accepted or applied.

On the other hand, there are few experts in golf property valuation and often a property assessor who wishes to avoid future confrontations will be more receptive to a well prepared case in order to more effectively value other golf properties in his or her jurisdiction in the future.
Local pesticide legislation is an issue that affects the golf course industry more than any other. The Iowa Legislature recently passed Senate File 94, barring cities and towns from enacting their own pesticide regulations. This pre-emption of local laws has been a source of controversy and frustration for many local officials.

In 1991, the town of Casey, Wis., made a move to pre-empt local governments from enacting legislation concerning the use of pesticides. This move was met with resistance from the local community, who were concerned about the impact of pesticides on the environment.

The Iowa House of Representatives voted by nearly a two-thirds margin to accept a bill, Senate File 94, that allows state government to pre-empt local governments from enacting legislation concerning the use of pesticides. This move was met with resistance from the local community, who were concerned about the impact of pesticides on the environment.

The issue of state pre-emption will now be decided in the domain of local officials. Many local governments are joining the fight to protect the environment from the threat of pesticides. They are working to ensure that local governments can enforce their own laws and regulations.

Who would pay for this staffing? (A particularly good question at a time when local governments are complaining about federal mandates they cannot afford to enact.) Local regulation would not reduce the use of pesticides. That mandate comes from individual companies and employers. Can you imagine the difficulty of compliance in every city in the state of Iowa if it had its own separate legislation? I suggest state government agencies work together to create a pesticide certificate that requires all pesticide applicators to pass a test. This certificate would be a requirement for all pesticide applicators.

The Iowa golf course industry has worked hard to help this bill pass through the state to help the local community. They have been2 strong advocates for the local community, and their efforts have been recognized.

The golf course industry makes itself heard. They are viable businesses in the state and that judgment is made by the state to pass tougher legislation? Few tax assessors — or real estate appraisers — are experienced in performing these valuations, and often the golf course is valued exclusively by reproduction cost analysis. Many golf courses, especially those associated with residential developments, cost more to build than their economic worth basis and thus unfairly high property assessments result. Additionally, the unfamiliar tax assessor may attempt to support his reasoning with recent golf property sales using a price-per-hole analysis comparing incomparable properties having the same number of holes and resulting in an inaccurate analysis.

Neither of these methods considers the property's income potential or the portion of that income that may be produced by personal property or business efforts or is not taxable as real estate.

In recent years, many stronger valuation techniques for golf property valuation have been developed as the real estate appraisal profession has devoted more attention to golf courses. The Appraisal Institute has published a new book on the topic, numerous articles have appeared in appraisal publications on golf property valuation and there is a professional group of the most active and experienced golf course appraisers and analysts called the Society of Golf Appraisers, all of which has happened in the past three years. Appropriate.

Continued on page 12

DOAK BACKS AGSCA PRESIDENT
To the editor:

I would like to note my agreement with the letter from architect Jerry Matthews printed in your January 1994 issue, with regard to your voting on the "Best Architect of the Year." I have the greatest respect for Tom Fazio, who was again named Architect of the Year, but I think that it does every architect, including Mr. Fazio, a disservice for you to have such an award.

Essentially, your voting is little more than a popularity contest in what is, unfortunately, increasingly a personality-driven business. Any equitable judging of golf course architecture must be made on a course-by-course basis, though even those judgments are biased by the designer's reputation and project budget. To vote on designers themselves tilts the playing field severely in favor of the handful who are household names and whose work is widespread enough to be known to all your readers.

Few of us would pretend to challenge the output of Tom Fazio's office over the past several years. We only wish we'd had the half the opportunities with spectacular sites and generous budgets that he's had.

But if you'd change your award to look at individual designs instead of business reputation, I think you'd have a much more competitive and meaningful award, instead of simply reinforcing the status quo.

Tom Doak, president Renaissance Golf Design, Inc.

GUEST COLUMNIST
'Tis the season for tax tips

By LAURENCE A. HIRSH

As local governments become harder pressed for operating revenues, they increasingly look to real estate taxes as revenue sources. Golf courses seem to be an easy target. Why not? Only 12 percent of the population plays golf and most are perceived by non-golfers as "rich people in bright clothes chasing a little white ball." Certainly a politically acceptable target.

The golf course industry can fight back.

Since real estate taxes are ad valorem (as to the value), the primary issue is usually the appraised or assessed value of the property. Golf courses and country club present a complex and unique valuation problem. Few tax assessors — or real estate appraisers — are experienced in performing these valuations, and often the golf course is valued exclusively by reproduction cost analysis. Many golf courses, especially those associated with residential developments, cost more to build than their economic worth basis and thus unfairly high property assessments result. Additionally, the unfamiliar tax assessor may attempt to support his reasoning with recent golf property sales using a price-per-hole analysis comparing incomparable properties having the same number of holes and resulting in an inaccurate analysis.

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It's ugly. It's slow. It's expensive. But it works like gangbusters.

And that's what really counts where your turf is concerned. Sure, there are other ways to go but nothing else is as proven and dependable as Verti-Drain®. It's been tested and trusted by the best in the business over decades to generate deep root growth with all sorts of soils and grasses. Simply put, it works. It's the only way to go. It can work for you.