It's time to walk the walk

When it comes to environmental stewardship, where exactly do superintendents stand? I was reasonably confident that I knew the answer to that question, but recently I have become less certain. Here's why:

For all of Audubon International's bluster, they have only certified two percent of the golf courses in the U.S. A scant 13 percent are members of their programs. I could have done the math myself, suppose, but the numbers were still surprisingly low.

In a Golf Course News Poll last month, we found that 75 percent of superintendents surveyed said environmental stewardship was "very important" to the future economic health of the game of golf. However, that is the case, how come only 39 superintendents showed up at Audubon's environmental session at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Atlanta?

In last month's Point/Counterpoint, contributing editor Kevin Ross eloquently explained the disconnect between superintendents' environmental goals and Audubon certification, and it makes sense. Perhaps the phrase "environmental stewardship" has become hackneyed. Maybe too much environmental mumbo jumbo has been downgraded superintendents' throats too fast. Or maybe a majority of courses are already using IPM and other environmentally responsible practices but just don't see the value in completing the paperwork necessary to join Audubon or some other environmental program. After all, no one is forcing golf courses to give up chemicals or put up bird boxes - yet.

But equally enlightening was the counterpoint made by Audubon's Kevin Fletcher. Self-regulation, through a program such as Audubon, could prove valuable to the golf industry. By demonstrating that a large percentage of courses are adhering to a set of managed environmental standards, the industry could avoid the scrutiny of federal and state regulators.

Read the story on page one about Audubon's new sustainable communities campaign. Not only does it offer a chance for the golf industry to be a leader in communities around the country, but it is also another opportunity to broadcast the message that golf courses are environmentally responsible and sustainable.

If you are still skeptical, scan down to the bottom of this page and read this month's Point/Counterpoint. The debate over golf's environmental impact (ill-conceived or not) is not going to go away any time soon.

POINT

Golf contaminates environment

Mark Twain's quip "golf is a good walk spoiled" probably characterizes his own frustration with the difficulty of the game of golf. However, he could just as easily have been describing his concern with the golf course as a "spoiled" or contaminated environment.

Golf courses are one of the most chemically treated land areas in the United States, second only to fruit orchards. The attorney general of New York State in a report, "Toxic Fairways: Risking Groundwater Contamination From Pesticides on Long Island Golf Courses," calculated that the average golf course applies pesticides at a rate of 18 pounds of pesticides per treated acre per year, about seven times the 2.7 pounds per treated acre per year applied in agriculture. A University of Iowa medical school study commissioned by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) found that golf course superintendents suffer elevated rates of brain cancer and non-Hodgkins lymphoma, similar to farmers. In evaluating the 36 most commonly used lawn pesticides, using Environmental Protection Agency and government reviews, Beyond Pesticides finds that 14 cause cancer, 21 reproductive effects, 14 neurotoxic damage and nearly all are skin irritants and sensitizers. One product label on an organophosphate pesticide reads that repeated exposure may make a person more susceptible to the effects of this and related chemicals. When EPA announced the phase-out of "residential" use of the highly neurotoxic, organophosphate, insecticide chlorpyrifos (Dursban) in June 2000, it retained numerous uses, including golf course maintenance. Despite extraordinarily high levels of concern associated with children's exposure to chlorpyrifos use on turf and its

COUNTERPOINT

Pesticides key to IPM program

Pesticides are an important component of an environmentally sound Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program. Turf pesticides should be used carefully and based on strong agronomic science. Their pre-market testing and evaluation are extensive, and their overall environmental track record is good. Finally, it is practically impossible to maintain a high-quality, heavily used golf course without synthetic chemical pesticides. Pesticides should be used judiciously but confidently as part of a scientifically based IPM program. Each superintendent should establish pest infestation thresholds for all key weed, disease, insect and nematode pests. In the management plan our company produces, we establish lower thresholds that trigger specific cultural or mechanical actions, and higher thresholds that trigger pesticide applications. This helps ensure that pesticides are only used when necessary. This can also help reduce pesticide use to other strategies. This approach has become more popular since the early 1990s. This more focused approach to pesticide use is supported by the trend for modern superintendents to limit broadcast treatment of pesticides, especially in areas that experienced heavy infestations in previous years and spot treat other areas. These two approaches tend to reduce pesticide use without sacrificing turf quality. Finally, intelligent pesticide use is being further advanced through the recent development of pest forecasting models such as those by Syngenta and the University of California-Davis. Past and predicted weather conditions for an area are used to forecast insect, weed (e.g., Poa annua) and disease infestations.

It's the buying team, stupid

Kudos to the GCSAA and to NGCO for recognizing what we at Golf Course News have known for several years — superintendents, as a rule, do not have blank checks to buy equipment and other products. It is this common business sense that led the two organizations to merge their shows in 2005 as the Golf Industry Show. The refrain is, "It's the buying team, stupid." The myth that superintendents hold all the purchasing power has permeated the industry for too long. It is only now, when economic circumstances aren't what they used to be, that the idea of a "buying team," which has long been our focus at Golf Course News, is starting to resonate. Of the more than 18,000 people who attended last month's GCSAA show, roughly a third were qualified to make purchases on the show floor.

Even more hearings is that she doesn't seem to be simple lip service from the associations. Michael Wallace, GCSAA past president, also recognizes the need to get his bosses involved. When he arrived late to the GCSAA's media roundtable, he apologized, saying he had been on the show floor, kicking tires with his supervisor.

While this move is plausible, what leaves a funny taste is the name. Calling it the Golf Industry Show leaves it open for all sorts of vendors (apparel, clubs, etc.). A more fitting name would be the Golf Course Industry Show. But, knowing how slowly change is affected in one large association, let alone two, the current name will have to do.
Golf has negative environmental impact

Continued from previous page

handling by workers, direct exposure to this pesticide will continue in and around golf courses.

Environmental impacts of the most commonly used turf pesticides include the fact that 14 have been found in groundwater, of which eight are toxic to fish. Eleven are toxic to birds, 12 toxic to fish or aquatic organisms and 12 to bees. Some pesticides are known to contaminate community water systems or wells, others run off into streams and waterways. All drift off the target site, which means they end up in neighboring yards, schoolyards and community parks. Neither golfers nor the public at large can take comfort in the fact that these pesticides are registered by the EPA because the health effects data for one is incomplete, the law allows for many hazards, children are not protected, and some of the most hazardous ingredients are treated as trade secrets and are not disclosed on the product label.

Because of these concerns, Be- yond Pesticides joined with other organizations to encourage planning and siting, design, construction and maintenance.

The document assumes regulatory compliance and encourages managers "to go beyond that which is required by law." In that spirit, it is hoped that golf course managers will stop the continued use of chlorpyrifos. The document stresses the prevention of pest problems through the encouragement of "maintenance practices that promote the long-range health of the turf and support environmental objectives..."

Jay Feldman is executive director of Washington, D.C.-based Beyond Pesticides.

MAILBACK:

AUDUBON VS. GCSSA CERTIFICATION

TO THE EDITOR:

Kevin Fletcher of Audubon International does a fine job in counting out of Kevin Ross' points in the Point/Counterpoint feature of your February edition. I'm very proud of my club's membership in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) for golf courses, but I understand that Audubon certification may not be right or even possible for all clubs.

My issue with Mr. Ross' point about the ACSP is the irony - or the hypocrisy - I see in the letters below his name. Does Mr. Ross see personal GCSSA certification of superintendents as still having some appeal? Since only a small percentage of superintendents in the U.S. are certified, does Mr. Ross think the GCSSA is going back to the drawing board?

I have no intention of being certified as a golf course superintendent. So by Mr. Ross' reasoning, my GCSSA annual dues should be $41.67 because "in today's depressed economy," $250 is a lot of money for some clubs. Any club that cannot afford the $150 Audubon membership fee certainly can't afford their superintendent's GCSSA dues, let alone the cost for continuing education and attendance at the annual trade show.

Mr. Ross seems to think someone made a promise - that he considers "dubious" - that the GCSSA will save courses money, presumably by employing IPM techniques. Well, Mr. Ross, no professor in turf school or anyone I've ever worked for in this business the last 20 plus years ever told me I had to join the GCSSA to make any decisions for me, either.

But if I ever had to decide between my membership in the ACSP and the GCSSA, I'll have an easy choice. At least I would know that my dues are going toward encouraging sound environmental practices by golf courses and not to feeding a ravenous, self-perpetuating, self-embracing bureaucracy.

Sincerely,

Tom Carlson, superintendent
The Venice Golf and Country Club, Venice, Fla.

Rostal joins GCN advisory board

Golf Course News has added superintendent Matt Rostal to its editorial advisory board.

Rostal, 36, is finishing his second year as superintendent at Interlachen Country Club in Edina, Minn. The Donald Ross-designed layout recently hosted the successful 2002 Solheim Cup.

Rostal has spent his entire career at Interlachen, starting in 1990 on the turf mainte-

nance staff while attending the University of Minnesota. He worked his way up to assistant superintendent, and then to superinten-
dent. Rostal has a degree in finance from St. Cloud State University and a degree in agronomy from the University of Minnesota. He lives on property at Interlachen with his wife Wendy and eight-month-old daughter, Lily.

Good morning, everybody.

Jim Cunningham.

I'm here with Rosalyn from KUSI

It's a beautiful day today.

You're gonna love what we got here.

Darla, take a look at this.

Darla, can you believe this?

We're on the beach.

Come on, Darla, let's go.

We got a little girl that's coming to check it out and she's very young.

Don't worry, she's gonna love the beach.

Let's go, Darla.

We're gonna have a great time.

Why don't we get started?

Yeah, let's go.

We're gonna have a great time.

Good morning, everybody.

Good morning.

We're on the beach.

Darla, can you believe this?

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