



Environmental Extremism And "The Code" – How Do You Respond?

By PAUL DIEGNAU, CGCS, Keller Golf Course



Allow me to share a story with you. Several weeks ago, I came across a "Letter to the Editor" in one of the local St. Paul community newspapers. The letter was entitled "Toxic Fairways" and from the title I think you can guess which direction this was headed. The letter was an attack on golf courses and their impact on the environment as noted in the sentence "Chemicals like herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, fertilizers and crabgrass inhibitors are all applied in sufficient dosages to give golfers the thickest grass possible." Never mind the fact that herbicides and fungicides ARE pesticides, a fact often misunderstood by chemophobes across this great nation of ours. But I digress. The richness of the letter continues on as the author paints a bleak picture for the children swimming in nearby lakes. "I only ask that they (golfers) think about the witch's brew of chemicals that end up in the body of every kid swimming in a lake anywhere near a golf course." And finally, the attack builds to the ultimate crescendo... "the real birdie died drinking from a golf course pond."

How do you respond? Do you respond? As stewards of the land, backed by years of scientific research that refute this attack, how could you look the other way? I recently came across a similar correlation in the May 22, 2006 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. The article was on the controversy surrounding the release of the movie "The Da Vinci Code." A Rev. John Skirtich tells of being approached by a woman in his parish, a lifelong Catholic, who inquired if Jesus was actually married to and had a child with Mary Magdalene. He assures her that the book and movie are pure fiction, but later realizes the magnitude of the controversy. "That's when it struck me," Skirtich recalled, "that ordinary believers -- people in my own parish who are not theologically trained -- were being deceived by the pseudo history in that book and I knew I had to do something about it." Left unchallenged, he explained, "the fiction passed off as history in The Da Vinci Code undermines what Christianity is all about."

What a perfect parallel for what we face in our own industry. If we remain silent on these issues, the propaganda being spewed forth by these environmental extremists becomes fact. The general public doesn't know any better. How many casual observers take the time out of their busy lives to research these issues? The mainstream media prefers sensationalism over truth whatever it takes to increase circulation or viewership. We as an industry must make a stand and present the facts. Oftentimes, living in the breadbasket of our country, we feel isolated from special interest activities occurring on the east and west coasts of our country. Please be aware that these special interest groups are alive and active in our own backyard. Case in point: the city of Minneapolis is exploring the idea of total "organic" maintenance for its golf courses and parks. Who's next?

For the record, I did respond. My response was published and I received very positive feedback from people I did and did not know. In my own little way, I educated the general public using facts that most are unaware of. It was a good and positive thing. Please take the lead when the opportunity presents itself. Make it a point to read the many pesticide and nutrient fate studies that exist. Educate yourself on the many benefits of healthy turfgrass

and open green space. The truth can be very powerful!

Below is the letter to the editor exchange that I referenced. The names have been changed to protect the innocent (at least in one case).

Toxic Fairways

To the editor:

Biking by ABC Golf Course recently, I noticed flocks of predominantly white males hitting the links, and I knew it was spring once more.

I don't care what a person does as long as it doesn't affect me. Thus, smokers are free to shorten their lives, but not in any place I frequent. However, things are not that simple with golf. Golf involves toxins that are not as easily noticed as cigarette smoke. Chemicals like herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, fertilizers and crabgrass inhibitors are all applied in sufficient dosages to give golfers the thickest grass possible. Unless the golf course is constructed over a layer of bentonite clay or some other impermeable membrane, the groundwater is the recipient of much of those chemicals. I've read that such an underlayment is

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163 Yard Par 3 eighth hole at the Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minnesota.



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In the Crosshairs—

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sometimes used around golf course greens, but what happens when we have a monstrous downpour. The technology simply doesn't exist to filter the toxic overflow even if we were to somehow trap it in a catchment pond.

While the golfers relax in their carts between holes, I only ask that they think about the witch's brew of chemicals that ends up in the body of every kid swimming in a lake anywhere near a golf course.

Nah. Too much such thinking could spoil a birdie. (The real birdie died drinking from a golf course pond.)

- Concerned Citizen

"Your neighbor has access to the same pesticides that are used on a golf course! Your neighbor most likely has no training or license, is not regulated by the state and doesn't keep records. Have you ever heard of the 'more is better' mentality? That mindset is prevalent in the homeowner landscape maintenance industry as I personally witnessed during my many years as a master gardener."

or license, is not regulated by the state and doesn't keep records. Have you ever heard of the "more is better" mentality? That mindset is prevalent in the homeowner landscape maintenance industry as I personally witnessed during my many years as a master gardener.

I would suggest that Mr. Paulos spend more time keeping an eye on the chemical application activities of his neighbors and possibly re-evaluate his position on golf courses and the environment. The golf courses of today are environmental assets that are maintained as such by trained professionals who consider themselves environmental stewards. How do your neighbors stack up???

- Paul Diegnau
Certified Golf Course
Superintendent
Keller Golf Course
Maplewood

Response to Toxic Fairways

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to the letter titled "Toxic Fairways" that appeared in the *Villager* this past week. Why the *Villager* would choose to print this classic example of fear mongering, full of emotion and lacking in scientific fact, is beyond me. But for the record, Mr. Paulos is correct in stating that pesticides and fertilizers are applied to golf courses. What he fails to mention is that:

+ Turfgrasses have a wonderful component called thatch. This is a layer of organic matter located between the grass plants and the soil and it is rich in carbon and microorganisms. This thatch layer is an effective natural filter that reduces pesticide mobility, and provides the "dinner plate" where microorganisms and bacteria consume and break down most pesticides into harmless by-products.

+ A tremendous amount of university research has been and continues to be conducted on pesticide and fertilizer fate in the golf course ecosystem. The USGA has provided millions of dollars for research on golf's impact on the environment. An overwhelming majority of the current research shows that when applied according to the label by a trained applicator, turfgrass pesticides have a negligible impact on the environment.

+ Anyone making a pesticide application on a golf course in Minnesota is licensed (must pass a test) and certified with the state of Minnesota and must meet continuing education requirements to maintain that certification.

+ Golf courses maintain written records of all pesticide applications and apply product via sophisticated calibrated application equipment. The label is the law! Product labels are strictly adhered to in golf course maintenance.

+ Your neighbor has access to the same pesticides that are used on a golf course! Your neighbor most likely has no training

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The photos below illustrate the difference in particle size and uniformity between the Andersons small and mid-size fairway fertilizer and a competitor's product. Notice no nutrient segregation with Andersons mid-size due to uniform particle sizing versus significant nutrient segregation with competitor.

Andersons 25-3-9 + 2% Fe (150 SGN)



1 lb. of N per 1,000 = 175 lbs./acre = 3.7 particles per sq. in.

Local Competitor 15-5-10 (215 SGN)



1 lb. of N per 1,000 = 290 lbs./acre = 2.0 particles per sq. in.

The matrix shown below demonstrates a dramatic increase in particle coverage (PPSI) by using smaller particle products versus increasing the rate (lbs.) of a larger particle product.

Particles Per Square Inch Matrix 20-3-20 Fertilizer with 5% Nutrients										
	80	100	125	150	175	215	240	300		
100	15.0	7.7	3.9	2.3	1.4	0.8	0.6	0.3		
125	18.7	9.6	4.9	2.8	1.8	1.0	0.7	0.4		
150	22.5	11.5	5.9	3.4	2.1	1.2	0.8	0.4		
175	26.2	13.4	6.9	4.0	2.5	1.4	1.0	0.5		
200	30.0	15.4	7.9	4.5	2.9	1.5	1.1	0.6		
225	33.7	17.3	8.8	5.1	3.2	1.7	1.2	0.6		
250	37.5	19.2	9.8	5.7	3.6	1.9	1.4	0.7		
300	45.0	23.0	11.8	6.8	4.3	2.3	1.7	0.9		
Avg. SG (g/ml) = 1.8										

The illustration below shows the effect of using a non-uniform fertilizer product. Note the severe skewing and banding of different nutrients.

Uniform Particle Distribution
Spreadability: Particle Flight

Varying particle sizes and density cause irregular ballistic behavior resulting in inconsistent delivery of product.



"Get the Andersons small or midsize particle advantage"

- Andersons small and mid-size fertilizer blends provide a uniform application of nutrients across the entire spreader swath.
- Andersons fertilizer blends provide up to 7 times more particles per square inch (PPSI) than typical fairway grade products.
- Avoid inconsistent turf response by experiencing the Andersons formulation advantage. Compare Andersons SGN advantages and discover true performance and value.

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