



## *In Bounds: Environmentalists? You bet!*

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There was a time in our nation's not too distant past when rivers would spontaneously combust due to the industrial wastes and other pollutants discarded in an "out of sight, out of mind" fashion. As a youth I remember news of a fire upon the Cuyahoga and have since learned that river blazes were a common occurrence in that day. Public reaction to the infernos spurred new and responsible laws to protect the environment.

**Prior to bans on hazardous chemicals**, the waters of Lake Erie were unsafe to swim in. It is hard to imagine that at one time this 10,000-square mile lake had so many contaminants that recreational use including fishing and swimming were halted. Today, the water is safe to swim in again and a person can consume some of the rebounding trophy fish caught in this great basin. This came about because of responsible legislation and change in manufacturing processes.

**"Acid Rain," a catch phrase of the 1970s and 80s.** At one time I was told that our forests and monuments would disappear in my lifetime because of the effects of acid rain. In 1990 our Congress passed the Clean Air Act and reduced the levels of sulfur dioxide emissions (the major contributing factor of acid rain) by coal burning power plants to a point where acid rain isn't even being talked about any more. A responsible reaction to an issue we thought would consume our national wonders.

Growing up in a rural area, just outside a soon-to-be sprawling metropolitan city, rarely would I see Canada Geese, Bald Eagles or even Deer. In fact, sighting any of these animals would bring traffic to a halt as people gazed with mouth open wonder for surely the witnessed animals were the last in our state of Minnesota. Responsible and managed hunting practices, the ban of certain pesticides, and a reduction in the use of lead-based products have allowed these animals and many more to multiply to a point where they are dismissed as common.

In the 1970s, my heart would catch watching TV whenever the crying Indian commercial ran. With tall smoke stacks in

the background, a Native American paddles down a polluted river. In the next scene, a discarded bag of trash landed in front of his feet. A tear rolled down his saddened face as he viewed the pollution upon his "native" land. The narrator

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announced "Some people have a deep, abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country; some people don't. People start pollution. People can stop it."

**We have come a long way in the last 40 years.** As a nation we really have cleaned up our act.

During my youthful days upon a golf course working as just another grunt, I applied heavy metals and chlordane to combat turf maladies. In little more than a torn "t" shirt, shorts and no shoes I applied chemicals that today would cause my heart to skip a beat. Thank God my children are as normal as can be expected considering the genetic stock they came from. Scary stuff brother!

On the other hand however, these were the first chemicals available to enhance our improving turf management practices and give the suddenly more demanding player better conditions. The tools of the trade included some real nasty stuff, but the products did control many issues that had plagued turf managers for years.

**Quite a few of the young "turfies" today don't have a clue what it was like** to lose literally acres and acres of turf to disease or insect damage. A bad winter alive with snow mold led to a tough spring which predisposed the turf to a challenging summer. There is a reason *poa* used to be called June grass and why so many courses were considered September Clubs. It was darn hard to keep a good stand of turf for a whole season.

**"Paint it white and sleep at night"** was a popular and very true slogan for one of

the most effective and commonly used chemicals, Daconil. It is still in use today. However now there is a greater awareness of our environment and our profession's impact upon it. Lighter rates of pesticides applied more frequently often do a better job of managing infections. And we know that because as an industry through professional trial and error, research at our great universities and countless dollars from the often categorized "evil" pesticide companies spent studying chemistries and reactions have proven it.

Rotation, spot spraying, curative and scouting are terms that have come through environmental awareness and the turf industry's attitude of being more than recreational property and becoming sanctuaries for nature. Indeed, very few managed destinations can claim both. Today's golf courses are often filtration systems for effluent water, caps for land fills, designated green space and water shed management areas besides the obvious recreational facility.

**We are responsible environmentalists.** Our chemical manufacturing partners are responsible environmentalists. Our industry is very environmentally oriented. Continuing education (often sponsored by pesticide producers) affords us opportunities to fine tune and expand upon new ideas and appreciate old theories about managing our resources while still maintaining our livelihoods.

**Combined with tried and true cultural practices** such as aerification, topdressing and tree removal, responsible chemical use is important to golf course superintendents and their ability to manage their courses. To say that golf courses are toxic waste sites is ridiculous. To say that pesticide manufacturers don't care about the application of their products is preposterous. To say that Superintendents are a bunch of idiots who apply chemicals willy nilly without regard to the environment down right upsets me. Too be irresponsible would be detrimental to our work space, our patrons and our employment.

We've come a long way, baby! Both as a nation and as an industry. By doing the right thing, letting go of the old habits and making better choices, we really have enhanced our lives. Today as I choose what products to use for snow mold control I will likely see a bald eagle, appreciate green turf, wave to my players and thank God that I am alive; who I am, where I am and when I am in our history.