

WORKING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES

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A variety of environmental agencies are involved in many aspects of your life and your business. It is not a matter of whether you want to work with environmental agencies--the fact is that you **must** work with them.

For many people, environmental agencies seem to be divided into two types--governmental and private. Each type can be further sub-divided depending on the specific purpose of the organization. Generally, however, most governmental agencies focus their attention on "permitting," while most private agencies focus on what "environmental advocacy."

Our form of government, although it may not seem like it at times, is permissive by nature. The role of government is to develop laws, rules, and regulations that govern what individuals may do. This process is in place to assure that the actions of one individual do not adversely affect the rights of another individual. The debate begins when there is disagreement concerning what may or may not be permitted. Most private environmental agencies advocate the strongest possible requirements and restrictions to regulate the permitting process. In many instances, private agencies as well as independent citizens speak out during public hearings, write letters to their elected officials, or become involved in other activities in an effort to influence laws as well as the regulating and rule-making process.

It is interesting to note that many of the governmental and private environmental agencies believe they have something in common. That is, they believe it is their responsibility to protect the public and public rights. In order to provide this "public" protection, both groups focus their attention on the **use** of the environment.

The question--"Is it a public right to play golf?"--is an important one. For many, even though playing golf may fit into their definition of "pursuing happiness," playing golf is not a "right" that is automatic. Consideration must be given to the use of public resources such as air, water, and wildlife before permission is given to play golf. The rights of one person or a group of people end where the rights of another individual or group begin. This fine line, where two interests come together, is where most conflicts occur.

It is important to be aware of what I call the 5-90-5 rule. That is, no matter what the subject, you will find that 5% of the people will be against what you are proposing, 5% of the people will support what you are proposing, and 90% of the people won't have an opinion, or even understand what you are proposing. It is common practice for most people to spend more time working with and talking with the

5% who agree with our position. These people are friends and share the same beliefs and understanding as we do. On the other hand, we focus much of our anger and attention on the 5% who are opposed to what we are proposing. These are the people who are writing letters, making phone calls, and showing up at meetings and disrupting the entire process of decision making. Although this process is fairly common, we are not focusing any attention on the 90% in the middle that never get involved at all!!

My advice is this. Do not spend all of your time worrying about the 5% that will oppose you. And, perhaps more importantly, do not spend all of your time working with the 5% who are totally supportive of your efforts. Instead, reach out to the 90% who are uninformed or uneducated. Develop and promote a positive agenda. Have the necessary facts and continue to gather data and information. Be open to new suggestions. Develop and cultivate relationships with non-golfing interest groups and agencies. Try as hard as you can to not make your mind up about people before you even meet them. Listen to people and talk to them. You might just find that some of the 90% will move over to the 5% of your supporters, not only increasing that number substantially, but becoming your personal friends in the process.