

USGA

"Nobody Wants To Go Where I Want To Lead Them"

By Pat Gross, Agronomist

It's difficult to be a leader and always do the right thing. When it comes to golf course maintenance, there has been a clear message from the public that they are concerned about water use on golf courses, personal exposure to pesticides and the fate of pesticides in the environment, and the effects of golf course maintenance activities on wildlife. The response by the golf industry has been to conduct research in many areas, which resulted in the development of drought tolerant grasses, integrated pest management strategies, low-impact pest control products, and a program to enhance wildlife habitat on golf courses - the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. The response by golfers has been surprising; many are unwilling to change if it means the grass will not always be brilliant green, or the putting surfaces 2" slower, or if it will cause green fees to go up 50¢! As

a result, superintendents are sometimes caught in a vicious cycle of keeping grass alive by over watering and frequent pesticide applications for fear of losing their job even though they know it may not be the right thing to do.

As a leader, the superintendent has an obligation to educate their golfers and management, but what can you do if nobody wants to go where you want to lead them? Keeping in mind that it is their club and you are only an employee, it is still your responsibility to point out liabilities and opportunities for improvement. A good starting point is to make the club management aware of the weak areas in the maintenance operation while offering your plans and recommendations for improvement. There is no need to forcefully demand that things be done immediately, but rather demonstrate your willingness to take a leadership role to improve the maintenance

operation. Here are a few suggested projects and practices to accomplish this goal:

- Conduct an environmental audit of the golf course and maintenance facility. Are pesticides stored safely? Where does rinse water go after cleaning of equipment and sprayers? Is application equipment in good working condition? Are training records up to date? Is there a large stockpile of old pesticides in the storage shed? Document these conditions and review them with the club management. Be ready with a list of solutions and a budget for any necessary improvements. They may not be ready to move forward right away, but at least you have a record of what needs to be done and a plan to get there.
- Make an effort to try new grasses on your golf course. Establish test plots in your nursery or in an out of play area of

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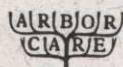
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Nobody Wants To Go . . . (Cont'd.)

the rough. Take the green committee out to look at the new grasses on the course or at local conferences and university field days.

Try to reduce pesticide use through better scouting, cultural management programs, and integrated pest management techniques. If your club is reluctant to try these methods, ask them to allow you to leave untreated check plots on one or two greens when applying preventive fungicides or herbicides, or implement a strong IPM program on three or four holes as a pilot program.

Take part in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. It's really embarrassing that this program has been around for nearly four years and there are less than ten courses fully certified in the West (only two in California). This is a great leadership opportunity for superintendents and I haven't heard a good reason yet for not participating. It's a win-win-

win situation for the club, the community, and wildlife.

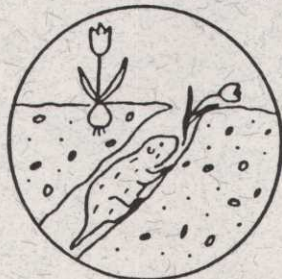
- Support turfgrass and environmental research for golf courses on a local and national level. The industry has made great strides in the past ten years, but there is much work yet to be done. Support them so they can support you.
- Make sure people know what you are doing. After all, if you don't bang the drum how is anyone going to know there is a parade? Take photographs of all your projects on the golf course. When you are checking the greens, take the opportunity to talk with the golfers and show them what you are doing. Also, make sure your staff is well informed so they can answer simple questions from golfers.

Even if people don't want to follow your lead, forge ahead with good planning, persistence, public relations, and patience. Remember that change is often slow to occur, but it is inevitable. ♦

GCSAA Chapter Cooperative Research Program

The GCSAA is requesting proposals from local chapters for funding research programs on a local level. Our chapter, through our contribution to the Platinum Tee Club with the CGCSA qualifies to compete for matching funds of up to \$10,000 per year for three years. **We need your suggestions for projects that you feel are necessary and worthy of funding by our next board meeting on November 14. Please contact any board member with your suggestions.** This is an excellent benefit that GCSAA offers to local chapters to increase the effectiveness of their research Dollars. For more information on the Chapter Cooperative Research Program, check out the July 1995 issue of *Golf Course Management* for further details..

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