

Pesticide Applicator Licensing:

A Ticket to Professionalism



By Matt Olivi

As sports field managers and groundskeepers we all share a common goal of improving our technical skills by continuing our education. This endeavor makes us better at what we do on a daily basis and increases our value to our employers, customers and peers. As I've always been a great proponent of professional development opportunities, a friend of mine who works in the educational community encouraged me to acquire a New Jersey pesticide applicators license. He explained to me how a licensed applicator is required to maintain a certain number of recertification credits over a five year period. By doing so, the applicator would maintain a working knowledge of current trade techniques and any corresponding laws and regulations. As a groundkeeper and sports field manager with only a few years of experience under my belt, I saw a great opportunity to expand my knowledge in the area of turfgrass maintenance practices. Also, in my particular case as a public school employee, I recognized that any knowledge I could obtain relating to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) would be beneficial to my employer. Therefore, I took the necessary steps to acquire my New Jersey pesticide applicators license and quickly began to put my credentials and knowledge to use.

Depending on the needs of particular employers and/or customers, the steps required to become appropriately licensed will vary significantly. In New Jersey, a licensed applicator is required to be certified in at least two categories and demonstrate proficiency in basic pesticide safety practices and regulations.

In addition, the applicator must be proficient in specific areas of expertise. For example, in my case as a sports field manager for a public school district, I am required to be certified in the categories of basic pesticide safety (Core), turfgrass (Category 3B) and School IPM (Category 13). All potential applicators are required to attend a state-approved Basic Pesticide Safety class and pass a written test corresponding to core materials and regulations. For any additional categories, the licensing procedural requirements may afford the applicator the choice of documenting on-the-job training experience or the completion of state-approved classroom instruction. Once the applicator has met these requirements, the state will schedule and administer a test date(s) to determine proficiency.

Although the process of fulfilling all of the licensing requirements can take several months due to course scheduling and testing, I strongly feel that the benefits of becoming a certified applicator are well worth the time and effort. It became clear to me almost immediately that the state-required courses I took to be licensed for turf applications were just the beginning of a never-ending education in turfgrass management. Once I became certified in Category 13, this became more apparent. Generally stated, the goal of school IPM is not to simply find the most effective product to solve a particular pest problem. It sometimes seems just the opposite. With all of the effective products on the market today, a well-educated applicator can usually control most pest problems efficiently. However, when considering IPM, the applicator and/

or IPM coordinator has a responsibility to use methods and products (i.e. low-impact pesticides) perceived to have less environmental impact than traditional synthetic pesticides. This brings a whole new element to the game. Now the applicator/IPM coordinator needs to understand the nature of the identified pest and the science behind it. For example, an applicator is able to identify a particular broadleaf weed such as a dandelion or plantain species populating a highly prioritized (indexed) playing surface such as a varsity football field. Traditionally, an applicator could apply a chemical pesticide containing the primary active ingredient 2,4-D to control these weeds on a selective, postemergence basis. While 2,4-D is a highly effective non-low-impact pesticide, a thorough IPM approach suggests that the application of this herbicide should not be the first step in a school environment. As a primary goal of School IPM is to limit exposure of children to pesticides not characterized as low-impact, traditional control methods would not be the best initial course of action. The certified School IPM applicator is required to explore other ways of controlling pests. By understanding the life cycle of the pest, the applicator and/or IPM coordinator can develop methods of disrupting the pest (i.e. broadleaf weeds) without inhibiting the growth and development of desirable species (i.e. cool-season turfgrass).

Alternative methods of control will greatly depend on pest thresholds set by the school district. If we use the example of the highly indexed, highly visible varsity

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Dr. Henry W. Indyk Graduate Fellowship in Turfgrass Science

As many of you know, the turfgrass industry lost a dear friend and colleague in September 2005. We will all miss Henry very much and would like to insure that his legacy lives on. The Indyk family would like to establish a memorial fellowship to support graduate students interested in applied turfgrass science. This fellowship is being created to help assure that tomorrow's graduate students have the financial resources to get an advanced degree in turfgrass science at Rutgers University. To fund a full graduate assistantship each year in Henry's name, we will need to raise a total of \$400,000. Your generous support at this time will bring us closer to reaching this goal.

To make a tax-deductible contribution today, please send a check payable to the Rutgers University Foundation, 7 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. Be sure to indicate "Indyk Fellowship, Turfgrass" in the memo portion of your check. If you desire, you may provide a donation in the form of a pledge payable over several years.

For information on other ways to support this fellowship, please contact

Dr. Bruce B. Clarke, Director – Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science
(732) 932-9400, ext. 331; or clarke@aesop.rutgers.edu or

John Pearson, Director of Leadership Gifts at the Foundation, by calling
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football field in a stadium complex, our thresholds will likely reflect a very low tolerance for pests such as broadleaf weeds. Routine assessments of broadleaf weed cover (perhaps a percentage or index rating) may clearly identify a pest problem that can not be resolved through proper cultural practices alone. In this case, the applicator would have to document turfgrass maintenance practices and make a case for using a non-low impact pesticide (i.e. 2,4-D) as a last resort. As mentioned before, this process leading up to an application can be lengthy and is more tedious than traditional methods. Despite this lengthy assessment and record keeping process, there are benefits to its complexity. As a licensed Category 13 applicator, I am forced to expand my knowledge of proper cultural practices. A better

understanding of these practices makes record keeping even easier. Such methods, now documented, become justification for occasional use of non-low-impact pesticides.

Expanding knowledge of proper pesticide use and techniques for alternative pest control methods can be achieved through recertification courses held throughout the State. Applicators, as well as potential applicators, have the options of attending courses at Universities, privately operated state-approved pesticide training centers or state-approved trade association seminars. I've found that a combination of the three options will provide an applicator with the means to maintain the necessary amount of credit hours for each category over the five year recertification period. By utilizing all

three of these resources, applicators will find a great deal of flexibility in finding course and seminar topics that will best meet the needs of their individual pesticide programs.

Possibly, the most important resources a pesticide applicator has available are his and her peers. Sometimes a conversation with a fellow applicator over dinner or in line at a trade show registration table can be more valuable than a predetermined course topic. It's been my experience that as an applicator's knowledge grows and his or her experience level increases, so will their level of professionalism and credibility in the industry.

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