T he doublespeak emanating from the nation’s capital concerning health risks to America’s youth seems increasing. Consider the widely disparate actions of our legislators to reduce the health risks to youngsters from two sources—tobacco and pesticides.

This past spring Congress debated tobacco (again), and argued the wisdom of taxing cigarettes out of the economic reach of youngsters. This is logical and appropriate considering the tiny financial cost of addiction compared to the hugely expensive health problems that addiction creates.

So what does Congress do? It poses and postures, and does virtually nothing to keep youngsters from tobacco. It apparently feels that even talking about making America safer and healthier for kids is a sure thing with voters.

So, what’s this got to do with the green industry? Plenty.

In August, 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA). The Act amends FIFRA and the Federal Drug and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) and went through Congress like a speeding bullet.

The FQPA—one of whose cornerstones is protecting children and infants from pesticides—is a huge piece of legislation. It does no less than replace the pesticide laws we had been working under. It defines how the U.S. EPA will deal with pesticides and, consequently, with many of us. While most of the details are yet to be worked out, there are indications that the Act might be used to eliminate or reduce the use of some of our chemical products.

Contrast the rapid-fire passage of the FQPA, a complicated and problematic measure, with our legislators’ contentious wrangling over youth and tobacco where the evidence of risk to youngsters is overwhelming, if not damning. LM