

Preparing for the challenge

You may not have heard of the European Golf Association Ecology Unit or indeed the Global Anti-Golf Movement (GAGM) but increasingly ecological issues will impinge on greenkeepers and the golf courses they maintain. In terms of developing an environmental strategy for golf in Europe we are some way behind developments in the USA whilst from an Association viewpoint there is a clear need for guidelines and for the adoption of a pro-active position.

The EGA Ecology Unit was established earlier this year and is based in Brussels. Funded by the R & A, the PGA European Tour and the European Golf Association, the Unit is headed by David Stubbs as Executive Director. He will be known to a number of you through his past participation in BIGGA seminar programmes. This body represents 26 Golf Federations and will act as a clearing house for information. It will be able to take the pressure off individual countries spending time and money building up their own defences against the likes of the Global Anti-Golf Movement, which is contracted to the intimidating acronym of "gag 'em", and claims a membership of 250 groups in 15 countries. One of their recent meetings brought together 300 participants from ten countries including the United Kingdom. This grassroots movement has signified its presence by declaring a World No Golf Day – and subsequently a World No Golf Year. It has also militated for a moratorium on new golf course construction and called for a ban on the introduction of the sport into the Olympics. Have no doubt that formidable forces are lining up who believe that golf courses serve only to rob farmland, destroy national parks, waste precious water and increase the use of toxic pesticides and herbicides needed to keep greens green. Over the past six months there have been a record number of critical reports in the USA media about golf courses and pesticide use.

Both individual greenkeepers and the Association need to be prepared. We will need to accentuate the positive and to be in



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

possession of hard facts and detailed information which is where the Ecology Unit will be able to help. In recent discussions with David Stubbs, we are agreed on the need for BIGGA to adopt an increasingly high-profile role in environmental matters working closely with the Ecology Unit. There will be a need for research and to establish a European database on golf course management practices. Discussions are ongoing regarding an official Ecology Unit Survey in conjunction with BIGGA. On this note, beware of unsolicited surveys seeking to elicit often sensitive information without stating how the information will be used and for what purpose. Ultimately, it could well be used to your own and the profession's detriment.

'We need to know of good working practices – and of problems too'

The Association must move forward with the EGA Ecology Unit and the forging in recent months of close links augurs well for a united approach to ecological matters.

The R & A has recently agreed to create an R & A Golf Course Advisory Panel to replace the former Joint Golf Course Committee. The object of the Panel, which will consist of members invited from the Home Unions together with persons with specialist knowledge, will be to advise the R & A External Funds Supervisory Committee on the use of funds which they might make available for research and environmental concerns as they affect golf courses, and for bringing about a general improvement

in the construction and maintenance of golf courses. Amongst the Panel working parties under consideration is one to cover ecology in Europe and whilst at first sight there would appear to be some overlapping of function with the work of the Ecology Unit Management Committee, it is certainly encouraging that ecological concerns are now to the fore within the game of golf.

As individual greenkeepers you need to be alert and aware. You need to know the facts and communicate them to golfers, media and decision makers in your local community. You will need to participate in a grassroots campaign to build an influential lobby which supports golf courses as environmentally friendly. Let others know about the environmental benefits of golf courses, the safety of your practices and the testing and research required to register a pesticide product. Invite those with influence to visit your course and see your facility firsthand. Ensure that you apply environmentally sound management techniques on your golf course and seek to promote a positive environmental image of both golf and the golf course.

Together we must use our magazine, *Greenkeeper International* to promote the positive environmental aspects of the golf course and where you have practical examples please let us know about them. We need information, we need to know of good working practices and we need to know of problems too. The Association must commit itself to a process which will encourage every greenkeeper to conduct golf course management practices in a manner which respects the environment. The use of turf chemicals, the impact of water and soil quality, amounts of irrigation water used and disruption of wildlife habitat are all concerns which must be addressed by the golf industry. Your input is vitally necessary and in combining research, education and communication, BIGGA will seek to overcome public misconceptions of the negative environmental impact of golf courses which if left uncorrected will surely pose a serious threat to the vitality and integrity of the game.

Boost for BIGGA's new library

More than £300 worth of books have been delivered to BIGGA's new library, courtesy of Lewis Publishers, a leading publisher of books on turf management.

The set of books includes: James Vargas' 'Management of Turfgrass Diseases: 2nd edition' (£52.50); Ann Leslie's 'Handbook of Integrated Pest Management for Turf and Ornamentals' (£61.50); the United States Golf Association's 'Wastewater Reuse for Golf Course Irrigation' (£45); Donald Harker et al's 'Landscape Restoration Handbook' (£65); James Balogh & William Walker's 'Golf Course Management and Construction: Environmental Issues' (£61).

Lewis Publishers, a US outfit which is making inroads into the UK and European golf scene, has also promised to provide BIGGA with a copy of Thomas Watschke's 'Managing Turfgrass Pests' (£57.50) when it becomes available later this month.

Then the Association's library, which was set up with funds from the R&A, will have a complete collection of turf management books from this publisher. After browsing briefly through the collection, one of the most interesting books looks to be the Handbook of Integrated Pest Management for Turf and Ornamentals as it looks at the latest developments in IPM, which is gaining ground as one of the most effective ways to limit pesticide use. This, and the other books in the collection, will be reviewed in a future issue by some of the UK's leading greenkeepers.

To find out how you can borrow the book from our library call 0347 838581. To order your very own copy send BIGGA a cheque (including £1.50 p&p).

Filming continues

Filming of BIGGA's latest video, a guide to course preparation, has moved from Prestbury and Royal Liverpool courses to the House of Lords. Viscount Whitelaw, BIGGA's president, will introduce the video, which is funded by BIGGA's Education Development Fund and will be launched at BTME.