

The Pesticide Debate

John Allbutt, Chairman of the Amenity Forum, discusses the future of pesticide use and the current forward steps the fine turf industry is taking.

It is very good to see the current active debate about the future availability of pesticides in the UK, the possible negative effect of our EU membership, and whether we might end up with little or nothing to use in the future. However it is very important that the debate includes an up to date picture of what is actually happening in the UK at the moment and what is likely to be happening in the near future.



Agriculture and amenity horticulture, this group includes sports and leisure as well as parks, gardens and amenity woodland etc, were threatened with a Pesticides Tax. The industry responded by suggesting that this be deferred while an attempt was made to voluntarily reduce pesticides use and seek ways of achieving 'best practice' where the use of a pesticides is considered to be necessary.

This became the Voluntary Initiative - the VI - that initiated a series of projects seeking to achieve the primary objectives of reduction and to achieve best practice when pesticides are used. It is true that the biggest area of VI activity has been in mainstream agriculture because the agricultural sector remains the biggest user of pesticides.

However amenity horticulture was never exempted and we were always included in the projects, e.g. the National Register of Spray Operators (NRoSO), www.nroso.org.uk, the National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS), www.nsts.org.uk, and the formation of the Amenity Forum (the AF).

To date, the membership uptake of NRoSO by certificated spray operators in the amenity sector has been very poor - due in part to the low level publicity. NRoSO is an ideal way of maintaining your PA Certificates up to date and to know about the changes since you originally took your test.

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The voluntary National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS) is an ideal way of being certain that your applicator is in good condition and will deliver a precise amount of pesticide, with an accurate spray pattern, at the set pressure, and won't burst a pipe in the process! Local test centres are in your area and ready to carry out this sprayer 'MOT'.

The formation of the Amenity Forum was an ideal opportunity to achieve a first in our industry - to bring together the many diverse sector interests, organisations and businesses that have, in the past, made it almost impossible to discuss, debate and cooperate in areas of common interest. Not only have we achieved this but we have also attracted as members the very government departments involved in forming the policies and regulations that could restrict our use of pesticides in the future, e.g. The Health and Safety Executive, Pesticides Safety Directorate, Environment Agency.

I am currently the Chairman of the Amenity Forum and am very lucky to have around the table representatives from across the amenity industry, including BIGGA, STRI, IOG, GTC and many more. To see our full membership look log onto www.amenity.org.uk. We exist to represent the amenity industry up to ministerial level for consultation and to lobby on behalf of our industry as a whole - a first!

Just one recent example of the effectiveness of the Amenity Forum is our involvement in the decision by the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) that the new Approved Code of Practice for Safe Use of Plant Protection Products - a provisional title - will for the first time incorporate amenity horticulture. This means that there will be a single Code for all pesticides use; it will be free and allow us, the amenity horticultural industry, to discontinue our own industry Orange Code. The new Approved Code is in the final draft stage and is expected to be published this year.

In a recent review the Minister said he was pleased with the progress of the VI and had no immediate plans to introduce a Pesticides Tax. However he also said that he was looking for the VI to have some new initiatives up to the end of the three year project, the end of March 2006.

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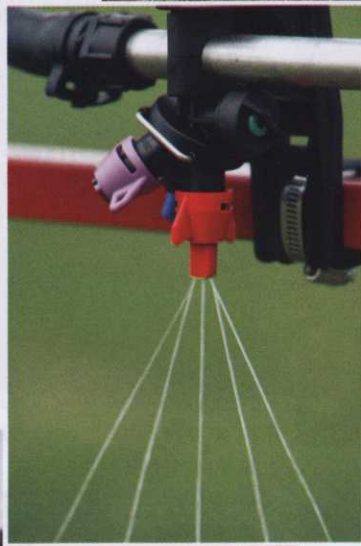
Although agriculture will again be very much in focus, current discussions are also pointing towards the amenity industry sector and the Amenity Forum have already put forward some views.

In addition to all of the above, there are also two very important consultation papers currently under discussion that are likely to have an impact on amenity horticulture in the future.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate is seeking views on their document "The Sustainable Use of Pesticides". This is a very good document and is likely to help with forming future policies and initiatives. The Amenity Forum is commenting on the 'Amenity Action Plan' section and we are hopeful that our suggestions will be incorporated in the final document.

A working group of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides is also consulting on their document "Alternatives to the use of Pesticides". Unfortunately this document deals almost exclusively with agricultural matters and the Amenity Forum are making representations to include many of the excellent alternative practices that have been in use for many years.

The traditional practices by greenkeepers to manage a healthy pest and disease resistant sward of turf are now regarded as a brilliant new approach! Minimising inputs



of fertiliser and pesticides - out of necessity - is now the 'new' approach in many aspects of land management.

In parallel with all of the above activity the UK/EU pesticides review process continues and is resulting in the withdrawal of approval for more pesticides. There is no question that this is having an impact in our industry sector; we have lost an effective worm killer, chafer grub control and with the likely withdrawal of chlorpyrifos in the future, we will lose our main means of controlling leatherjackets.

But this does not mean that it is an unstoppable process with the loss of more and more pesticides until we reach the situation that exists in some other member states. Many of the severe restrictions imposed by other European member state pre-date their membership of the

EU; there is also evidence that some of these have been 'rolled back' in recent years.

It is also very unlikely that we will see the introduction of local control of pesticides use where a professional greenkeeper has to seek written authority to apply a herbicide or a fungicide.

On a more positive note we are seeing some new fungicides being introduced and in the near future there will be a new insecticide for the control of soil grubs, mainly chafers.

Nobody in this process can stand aside and pretend that it is nothing to do with them. If we are to continue to have approved pesticides available we must all ensure that we embrace the principles of best practice. Golf clubs must have best practice policies within the course management document; greenkeepers must be encouraged to further develop existing best practice strategies; golfers must be patient and accept that some scarring of the greens is inevitable together with the odd weed here and there!

Committees must work harder to understand and support these important strategies and make sure that the members temper their criticisms, especially those who suffer from Augusta Syndrome.

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