



Advocacy and Compliance: What's It All About?

Our Association has formed a new committee this year. It is the Advocacy and Compliance Committee. This committee has taken the place of the Environmental Committee. As a new member on the Board of Directors, I was handed this committee and asked myself, and the Board, "Advocacy and compliance? What is it all about?"

Building relationships and getting to know our lawmakers are among the most important ways our Association can influence government actions that affect our jobs as golf course superintendents.

I contacted the director of information and public policy with the GCSAA after spending some time on the Advocacy and Compliance section of the GCSAA Web site. The GCSAA was encouraged to see our Association become proactive in becoming an effective advocate for the golf course management profession and sent me information to assist us in doing so. Their plan addressed three main objectives—communicating with lawmakers, building relationships with your lawmakers, and issue management—and presented ways to accomplish each objective.

Communicating with lawmakers is key. Believe it or not, for lawmakers to make informed decisions, they want to hear from their constituents. It is said that whether it is a letter, e-mail or phone call, that one communication is equal to hearing from 100 voters. Given the size of our Association, that letter or phone call would mean that much more. Stating our views and asking for legislators' positions lets both sides know where each stands on an issue. Once an issue has arisen, other ways to communicate with lawmakers are by writing a position statement or position paper, or testifying at a hearing. These are more formal forms of communication and would constitute a statement or declaration of our Association's policy on a particular issue. A position paper may also include additional information called "backgrounder papers" in an attempt to more fully explain specific issues and may originate from various sources. Even though legislators may not support our position on a particular issue or bill, they may the next time. The open line of communication is the important tool.

Building relationships and getting to know our lawmakers are among the most important ways our Association can influence government actions that affect our jobs as golf course superintendents. Inviting lawmakers to your property for a "golf course tour" is a great way to build relationships and teach them about our work. This gives superintendents the chance to showcase efforts made on environmental practices on the golf course. We can also invite lawmakers to speak at our chapter meetings as another way to build relationships. This sends a message that we care about their work AND helps them accomplish their goals by providing an opportunity to address their constituents. Don't forget the camera—both such events would make great photo opportunities for press releases. Lawmakers are usually eager to speak and having frequent contact with them will start to establish golf course superintendents as a good source of information on decisions they have to make.

Once we know who our lawmakers are and have open lines of communication with them, we will be in a better position to manage issues at the local level when the situation arises. We now have outlined a plan to assist us in managing local issues. The first step in this process will be to organize potential

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allies familiar with or affected by the issue and develop a plan to define the objective. Once this is accomplished, it is time to develop tactics to put the plan into action. Using the different forms of media to get the message out is very helpful. Media coverage, letters to the editor, and trade press contacts are all good avenues to building support for our issue. If the legislative or regulatory issue will make a huge impact on our industry, hiring a professional lobbyist may be the next move. Managing a piece of legislation or negotiating a regulation can be very time-consuming. A professional lobbyist can spend the time needed to get an important measure passed, amended or killed.

This all may seem like a lot to digest and is only a brief overview. I have more information than I could possibly include in this article, unless I wanted to put you to sleep (I haven't already done so, have I?). My goal here was to share the highlights. The point is, the GCSAA represents us as an Association at the national and local levels on many issues. With

government wanting to regulate industry more and more, we as an Association need to assist them on the local level by starting to develop relationships with lawmakers that will enable us to voice our opinions, educate lawmakers and develop representation on issues that affect our industry.



*Communicating
with lawmakers
is key.*

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