

Protecting Your Toolbox

RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)[™] is a national not-for-profit trade association representing producers and suppliers of specialty pesticides and fertilizers. Established in 1991, RISE serves as a resource and advocate on pesticides and fertilizers and provides current and accurate information on issues and research affecting the industry. The association also monitors legislative and regulatory issues in Washington, D.C., and in the states. GCSAA is a charter associate member of RISE and the two associations continue to work closely together to defend and preserve the right to use specialty pesticides and fertilizers.

*Frank Gasperini in
the Nation's Capital.*



RISE is currently searching for a Grassroots Manager who will be available to help golf course superintendents and other industry partners address local political issues regarding specialty pesticide and fertilizer products. Future articles will discuss state and local political issues and what you can do about them in more detail.

As you start the 2006 season, you may be thinking about the array of “tools” you have available to do your job to produce the best golf experience, using the most sustainable agronomic programs possible with the most positive environmental impact. For most of you, those “tools” include an array of pesticide and fertilizer products, along with the more “traditional” irrigation, rakes, shovels, mowers, power equipment, vehicles, and labor. You know that the appropriate use of inputs, including pesticides and fertilizer, on well-maintained turf not only produces green space that is pleasing to the eye, but that it actually protects and enhances soil and water resources and the overall environment. We have seen the results on well-maintained golf courses; university research across the country confirms that well-maintained turf grown with appropriate use of inputs results in cleaner water. Unfortunately, there is a substantial activist community that is working every day to “educate” the American public, and your elected officials, to the contrary. In Washington, D.C., where I work, I recently overheard a conversation between two officers of a large international conservation association. One of them said that “golf courses should not be allowed to count as green space in county growth planning, because we all know that they are nothing but mono cultures of unnatural, non-native grass plants that do nothing but pollute the ground and surface water with huge doses of fertilizers and pesticides!” This is what the public is being told, what our elected officials are hearing, and what our children are being taught in school. Of course it is wrong, but every time this misinformation is repeated, it hurts us all, like a thousand small cuts.

Over the years, we in the “Green” industry have tended to take the “tools” or inputs we need for granted. We are very serious about our profession

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and devote most of our time to perfecting agronomic, technical, and people skills. We have little time to worry about the politics and activism directed against our industry. The activist community however, has plenty of time to spread misinformation against your use of inputs and propose legislation and regulation to limit your choices. For many of them, it is their full-time job.

Increasingly, golf course superintendents and other green industry managers have replaced scarce labor with gas/diesel-powered equipment, precisely controlled irrigation, controlled-release fertilizers, improved plants, and precision use of pesticides. When a "tool" was lost to regulatory action or obsolescence, we replaced it with the next new innovation from the suppliers. Even though the "new tools" often cost more, they typically brought increased efficiency or effectiveness. We forgot about the "old tool" and considered it the responsibility of the "supplier" to offer new tools as needed and defend the continued availability of all the "tools" required to do the job. But where would we be if we lost all the tools?

With patent expiration, industry consolidation, and a global economy increasingly moving away from the agricultural life-sciences, where our agronomic innovations come from, we may find that we are losing "tools" faster than they are replaced. As it becomes more expensive and difficult to register and re-register pesticide products, we may see fewer and fewer choices. We continue to hear discussions on limiting the use of fertilizer, pesticide, energy, and water on turf grass.

We now hear the activist community, and some elected officials, refer to turf and landscape plants as "cosmetic uses that provide no benefit or value." These arguments have been carried to state legislatures across the U.S., with limited but growing success. Too many people believe the argument against golf courses and green lawns that I overheard in Washington. We need only look to our neighbors in Canada to see the results of this kind of activism.

While most of the current "bans" on turf pesticide use in Canada exempt golf courses, I attended a

meeting in Ottawa last fall where the mayor of a town in Quebec said that "I know our golf courses can stop using poison, too, and we will bring them into the bylaw next year." I wonder how those superintendents will cope.

As of March 2006, there are nearly 100 federal or state bills proposed that would limit the availability and/or use of some of the "tools" you rely on every day. Trade and professional associations, such as RISE and GCSAA, continue to work together to defend the industry, and we expect to defeat most of these bills again this year, but they are rewritten and proposed again year after year.

The activists understand the difficulty of passing federal and state legislation and increasingly turn to local government to take away your "tools". While most states preempt local pesticide regulation, the activists see growing success in limiting/regulating your access to fertilizers and other critical inputs. The activists always want more, so we are seeing rapidly increasing attempts to pass local regulations limiting your choices by requiring local bonding and certification, "use of pesticides only after other methods have failed" rules, or imposing unworkable storage requirements and confusing notification rules. Even though local

regulations are illegal in most states, activists promote them, towns and counties propose and enact them, and state legislatures and regulators are pressured to accept them. For those of you on municipal owned/operated courses, your town or county can adopt "no use" rules at will, and some have.

Because of the growing trend toward local activism, RISE, GCSAA, and other associations are working even closer together to help you defend your business/industry in your towns and counties when your "toolbox" is attacked locally. Unlike federal and state politics, things happen fast locally, and an outside "lobbyist" cannot manage the situation. Local issues require local response. If you are called on to defend your business locally, we want to help you prepare. Future articles will give you more details.

Frank Gasperini is Director of State Issues for RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)TM. Frank came to the Green Industry in 1980 as a pesticide industry sales representative in the Upper Midwest based in the Chicago area. He currently lives in the Washington, D.C., area and manages government issues in all 50 states.



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