Courses must tackle disposal

Twenty percent of the trash in landfills is landscape waste, and as many landfills across the country close down, the golf course industry will have to find new ways to discard of grass clippings and leaves.

With their landfills filling up quickly, more than 25 states have passed or are studying legislation to change the way people discard of their lawn waste. It is estimated that half of the 16,400 landfills in the United States will be closed by the year 2000. Creation of new landfills is slowed by strict and time-consuming licensing procedures.

States are encouraging homeowners and greenskeepers to recycle lawn debris rather than put it into plastic trash bags.

Bob Tracinski, consumer information manager for John Deere, said, "People can distribute their grass clippings across the lawn most of the time. Just follow the One-Third Rule and mow the lawn often enough to remove only one-third of the grass blade."

Trackinski said short clippings deteriorate quickly and return nutrients to the soil. Experts estimate that a season's worth of grass clippings is equal to one application of a commercial fertilizer.

While superintendents may worry about a buildup of thatch, Tracinski said thatch is more a product of shallow watering and over-fertilizing.

"Thatch is a layer of dead roots and stems," Tracinski said. "If it's over a half-inch thick, it can impede the flow of water and nutrients to grass roots."

Grass clippings also make good compost.

GOVERNMENT UPDATE

Research, education key to ground water problem

Ground water contamination can be prevented by further research and education rather than costly regulation, the U.S. Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry was told recently.

Dr. George Wallingford, East Central director of the Potash & Phosphate Institute, told the subcommittee that while incidents of chemical spills and leaking underground tanks have caused problems in some localities, they are site-specific problems and not indications of a national ground water crisis. The vast majority of America's underground drinking water is safe, he said.

'A huge body of knowledge and data already exists. It is critical that new research efforts not ignore earlier research, wasting time and resources duplicating programs and "re-inventing the wheel." '
— Dr. George Wallingford

He testified that while research will continue to play a critical role in identifying and correcting ground water contamination, existing data should not be overlooked.

"Industry, scientific bodies, universities, agricultural producers and federal and state agencies have conducted ground and surface water research in this country for more than a century," said Wallingford. "A huge body of knowledge and data already exists. It is critical that new research efforts not ignore earlier research, wasting time and resources duplicating programs and 're-inventing the wheel.' "

Wallingford said new research should be integrated with existing science and coupled with industry and producer education to prevent ground water contamination.

Specific research objectives, he said, should:

- Determine the extent and seriousness of potential agricultural contributions to ground water contamination.
- Develop improved farm and ranch production systems using Best Management Practices to improve water quality without sacrificing farmer profits.
- Develop less costly ground water sampling and monitoring techniques.

Wallingford said the Environmental Protection Agency has concluded that additional regulation would mean increased costs for essential services to residents of small communities and could drive many farmers out of business.

Wallingford also told the subcommittee that agricultural fertilizers are often falsely accused of contaminating ground water when unsafe levels of nitrates are found.

Citing a recent survey that found that 2.7 percent of 14,000 drinking water wells in Ohio had nitrate levels exceeding water-quality standards, he said, "Factors such as the age and depth of the well had a much greater effect on contamination than did the well's proximity to cropland."