

Obeying do's and don'ts carry weight with public

By Mark Leslie

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Claiming there is still time “to get our act together and do it right,” an official with Monsanto Agriculture Co. said people in the golf industry “have to start being a lot smarter in dealing with issues the general public concerning use of chemicals.

Saying the public has a right to notification about spraying, Tom Hoogheem of the St. Louis company warned: “There’s a right way to do it and a wrong way. We can do it now. We can do it the way we think is right and get some credit for it. Or we can wait and be forced to do it, possibly the wrong way, and get absolutely no credit.”

Speaking at the International Golf Course Conference and Show, Hoogheem scolded superintendents and others in the industry for either not speaking to the public and press, or saying the wrong things.

“We’ve made some stupid mistakes,” he said, enumerating seven things “I no longer want us to say...:

1) ‘I don’t know.’ “They ask: ‘Does this stuff cause cancer?’ We answer: ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Does it get into the ground water?’ ‘I don’t know.’

2) ‘I don’t care.’ “We can’t tolerate those people. They don’t follow the rules. They don’t dispose of their containers well. They don’t follow the labels,” Hoogheem said.

He said, “The people who don’t use our products properly are going to put us all out of business.

“From 21 years in the business

Show attendance down slightly

Attendance was slightly lower at this year’s Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Golf Course Conference and Show in Las Vegas, Nev.

The February event drew 16,500 people, down about 4 percent from the 17,200 a year ago in Orlando, Fla.

But, considering the war in the Persian Gulf and the current recession, “we’re pleasantly surprised with the numbers,” said GCSAA Director of Communications Pat Jones.

Foreign guests accounted for about half of the 700-person shortfall, according to GCSAA Executive Director John Schilling.

With special programs slated for Spanish and Japanese visitors, conference officials were expecting about 2,000 foreign visitors. But the number was closer to 1,600, Schilling said.

The Mideast conflict was cited by 300 to 400 potential guests from Europe and the Far East who canceled their plans.

“They felt travel to the show wasn’t something they could justify with the war in the Gulf,” the GCSAA executive director said.

Schilling said he expects a larger crowd at next year’s New Orleans show if the war ends and the economy improves as expected.

I’ve seen that 99.9 % of negative impact from pesticides on the environment have been from misuse.”

3) ‘Trust me, it’s safe.’ That usually accompanies No. 4.

4) ‘That’s confidential information.’ “ ‘What’s in these boxes?’ ‘Sorry, that’s confidential information; but trust me, it’s safe.’ “

Hoogheem said that survey after survey show “people don’t trust us because I make the chemical, I sell the chemical and ... you use it.”

5) ‘I’m not required to generate that information.’

“The rule of the game today is that if the general public asks the question we’ve got to have the answers. Rules are going to get more complicated, more difficult. But until we can make them more practical, we’ve got to play by the rules,” he said.

6) ‘No comment.’ We have to address the public’s concerns.

7) ‘We’re all guilty of this,’ he said. “We call those people ‘those damned environmentalists.’ The public thinks we must be ‘anti-environmentalists.’

We’re all environmentalists.”

Hoogheem cited what he called The 5-90-5 Rule for pesticides. This means that five percent of the people don’t care about pesticides, five percent are philosophically opposed to them no matter what the evidence, and 90 percent are “just plain scared.”

“We don’t spend time talking to people in the middle,” he said.

He added that complaints about the press telling only one side of the story are normally unfounded.

“Why do you think the press is

telling only one side of the story? Only one side has a story to tell. We avoid the press like a plague. And when we do talk, we say, ‘I don’t have to generate that information,’ or ‘No comment.’

“Let’s be experts,” Hoogheem said. “Let’s know how to address the issues. Let’s be sensitive to the general public’s concerns. God did not make turf to grow a 16th of an inch tall. We’ve got to have manmade inputs.

“We still have a chance to get our act together and do it right.”

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