

There's more to ponder than pesticide use

By PETER BLAIS

SUPERINTENDENTS=PESTICIDES=CANCER

It's an equation the golf industry claimed (and hoped) never balanced. The latest GCSAA study showing the increased likelihood of superintendents dying of cancer has caused some to re-examine that belief.

Certainly, opponents of the golf industry will jump all over any potential connection between pesticides and cancer. But before you run off to join their holy crusade against golf and the chemical companies, let's take a look at those plying the course management trade.

Superintendents are a hard-working lot. Their make-up and the nature of the job put them on a collision course with a number of factors that have been linked to increased cancer risk.

• **Stress.** Anxiety is a constant companion of anyone whose job is dependent on the whims of a doctor/lawyer/businessman who thinks he is an expert on growing grass because of his two-week golfing vacation in Scotland back in 1987. Throw in a million-dollar maintenance budget, 70-hour work week, responsibility for 20 employees and increasing contact with EPA, DEP, OSHA and the like, and the stress rarely ends.

Stress has been linked to cancer.

• **Smoking.** I don't have the scientific data to support it, but the cloud of smoke I walked through on my way to educational sessions and exhibits at the recent GCSAA Conference in Dallas leads me to suspect that superintendents smoke more than the general population. Maybe it's the stress that makes you light up. **Smoking** has been linked to cancer.

• **Weight.** On more than one occasion in the GCSAA Conference Exhibition Hall, I noticed two well-fed superintendents finding it difficult to pass by one another between those tightly spaced booths. Being 30 pounds overweight myself, it's hard for me to recommend people shed the extra pounds. What's that old saying? People who live in cellulite houses shouldn't throw calories. Maybe it's the stress. Maybe it's spending too much time in the office satisfying DEP, EPA and OSHA paperwork requirements rather than physically working the course. But whatever, excess **weight** has

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Recognizing, preserving golf courses as open space

By DAVID MACDONALD

I see golf courses in a different light than most of you. I don't play golf, but I do enjoy hiking, fishing, sledding and cross-country skiing. I value greatly three nearby golf courses that provide undeveloped open space for these and other outdoor activities to our local communities.

Golfers and conservationists are forging new partnerships, including the New York Audubon Society's efforts to preserve natural habitats — through its Golf Course Wildlife Sanctuary Program — and on Kiawah Island in South Carolina, where it recently took over stewardship of the



David MacDonald

David MacDonald lives and works on Mount Desert Island for the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, a state-wide non-profit land trust that has helped protect more than 55,000 acres and 160 islands in Maine.

Ocean Course.

Here on the coast of Maine, there is potential for similar efforts, in order to stem development pressure, buffer a national park and protect traditional recreational uses of golf courses by local residents.

In addition to the three golf courses, our community also happens to be the home of Acadia National Park, which offers some of the most diverse outdoor opportunities in the nation, drawing millions of visitors each year. Even in such a setting, with dozens of mountain trails and miles of shoreline from which to choose, golf courses hold their own as providers of significant open, recreational space.

What makes the courses so appealing as community open space is they usually back right up to the village — you can walk to them. Better yet, around here, the other side of the course often abuts an Acadia National Park boundary. The open space serves

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MacDonald comment

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as a link between the downtowns and the Park, and a buffer to the natural values preserved within Acadia.

In Northeast Harbor, the private golf club is set amidst a network of trails that link the different parts of the village to the Park and to town-owned land on Schoolhouse Ledge. Weathered cedar signs directing a hiker to Norumbega Mountain or Hadlock Pond stand beside the clean white arrows directing the golfer to the next tee. I know one woman who is a full-paying member of the club, not because she plays golf there, but because she walks her dogs there on her way to the trails of Acadia.

Kebo Valley Golf Club in Bar Harbor is a public course renowned for its history and scenery, but it is probably best loved by locals for its sledding hills, in particular the famed Big Bunker on number 17 — where President William Howard Taft once took a 17.

Like the Northeast Harbor links, Kebo is strategically placed between fully-developed residential areas and the pristine woods of Acadia. Numerous hiking trails and the popular Park loop motor road are within a wedge of Kebo's back nine.

Unlike the other two courses, the Causeway Club in Southwest Harbor includes shorefront property, wrapping around the eastern shore of Norwood Cove and linked to a nearby peninsula by a granite causeway and foot-bridge. The causeway itself — and its continuation onto club land — is one of the most scenic spots in the area, providing a favorite loop walk from the village, with views out to the Western Way and islands beyond.

All three courses are great places to play golf; the other traditional uses enjoyed by locals do not compromise the clubs' ability to serve their members. Golf clearly comes first here, yet the season is short in eastern Maine and the general public is able to enjoy the benefits of the open space year 'round.

...

Until I began working in the field of land conservation, I never considered that golf courses might not always remain as open spaces. But as I talked to more landowners struggling to hold onto their long-time family properties in the face of soaring real estate and inheritances taxes, it only figured that golf clubs might feel the pinch, too.

Maine's regressive property taxes places a great burden on the land by assessing properties, not according to their current use, but rather by looking at a property's "highest and best" potential use, financially — which, in most cases, is development. Golf courses here on Mount Desert Island are facing increasing tax revaluations and, by implication, the longer-term pressure to sell pieces of their holdings to help pay the bills. It has already happened on plenty of courses in other parts of the country.

Like farmland, golf courses possess qualities that make them especially attractive for development: good soils, easy access, land already cleared of trees and leveled for building sites and, of course, the amenity of the adjacent open space.

Owners and managers of golf clubs that have maintained these areas as successful courses and valuable open spaces deserve our thanks. They should also be urged to consider conservation options to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy the public benefits of open land.

Our nearby golf courses seem like local parks for at least half the year. My own experiences of fishing in Hadlock Brook, sledding on Big Bunker, and watching the tide rush in and out beneath the Causeway indicate to me how much these places mean to our local communities. The open space values of golf courses will only grow with time; their fates should not be left to chance.

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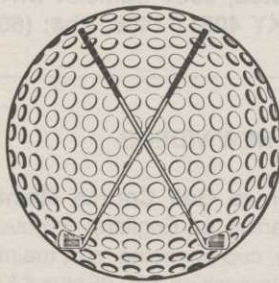


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