

Burning alternatives

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talists plans a different strategy: suing individual growers when they burn their fields. For now, with only Washington being affected, Clovis believes smaller growers, some of whom may have fields of 20 or so acres, will get out of the business.

Canadians, she said, are keeping an eye on developments in the two states, possibly intending to enter the bluegrass business. The climate is right, and more than 90 percent of all Kentucky bluegrass propagation is in the Pacific Northwest.

Patricia Hoffman heads a citizens group in the Spokane area called Save Our Summers (SOS). Founded in 1995, the group's primary concern is with health. "We founded the organization in response to 30-odd years of grass burning with no concessions [from the growers]," she said. "In 1963 there were only about 16,000 acres being burned in the region, including Idaho. And now the acreage burned is around 100,000."

"There have been fatalities as well," Hoffman said. "Two asthmatics, one in Washington, one in Idaho, died within 12 hours of smoke intrusion. That's a pretty high price to pay for golf courses."

In Idaho, The Clean Air Coalition plans to base lawsuits against growers by invoking the state's trespass law, according to *The North Idaho Business Journal*, "...to prove that the invading smoke constitutes a trespass on another landowner's property."

SOS is attracting more members and now numbers about 1,500. The group was actively lobbying to suppress grass burning, and with the current ban is "very gratified with the Department of Ecology's action."

Bluegrass industry spokespeople regard the conflict as an emotional issue blown out of proportion as a health concern. Countering this, the DOE and SOS feel there is enough evidence to support their contentions that the smoke is indeed harmful to human lungs, especially those of persons with respiratory problems.

EcoSoils

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EcoSoils Systems, Inc. a San Diego technology company, thinks it has solved this challenge with its Bioject Biological Management System. However, EcoSoils must clear a major hurdle — the same hurdle many chemical formulators must clear — before it will see its units in many more golf course irrigation systems.

The company's Bioreactor, first designed to deliver nitrogen fixing microbes to the soil, must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). The company is currently preparing to submit to the agency test protocols and to conduct field testing.

The Bioject Bioreactor automatically dispenses starter cultures of microbes (inoculum) and their required food sources (media) into a fermentation chamber where the microbes grow into high population numbers. Once the desired volume is achieved, the inoculum-laden slurry is spread over the course via the existing irrigation system.

The system is currently in place some 200 courses, including two Chicago facilities: North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Ill., and Congressional Country Club outside Washington, D.C.

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