

Water research

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expected higher concentrations of chemicals and a higher frequency of detection because of storm-water runoff. But he was unpleasantly surprised by high detection rates in the ground-water database.

"I think that if we got more data from more sites, the two [ground and surface water] would even out," he said.

"I feel if we had more data from more golf courses around the country, and where the wells weren't immediately adjacent to managed areas, the ground-water detection rates would drop off significantly over time."

Indeed, a source of optimism is that the monitoring wells in the golf course studies were usually shallow and next to treated turf, whereas agricultural studies have usually focused on drinking-water wells that are deeper and farther away from treatment areas.

"The results are actually favorable for [golf courses] when one considers that fact," Cohen said.

Cohen will recommend to the GCSAA Research Committee that an updated study be done in a year or two. "We learned there are many studies just beginning, or not yet finished," he said. "We think our research actually catalyzed interest in doing studies. We got several calls from golf course superintendents wanting information so they could perform research."

Citing the need for studies in the mid-continent and other areas, because of "major geographic deficiencies" in previous research, Cohen said, "It would be appropriate for others besides the golf industry to step up to the table, perhaps working jointly with the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] and/or pesticide manufacturers on studies."

Despite geographic data gaps, some conclusions are apparent after reviewing the 16,700 database entries from the 38 golf courses in his study, Cohen said.

The concentrations of nitrate in ground water were surprisingly low—lower than what is typically seen in intensive agricultural areas, he said. Nitrate concentrations in surface water were also low. Pesticide detection rates and concentrations in surface water were somewhat lower than expected.

The federal standard for Maximum Calculation Level (MCL) or Health Advisory Level (HAL) of nitrate is 10 parts per million (ppm). The HAL is the upper concentration a person could drink in water for a lifetime without showing any harmful effects. Levels slightly above 10 ppm might or might not be harmful.

Testing of wells, drains and lysimeters at 72 locations showed an average concentration of 1.6 ppm of nitrate in the ground water. Thirty of 849 data entries exceeded 10 ppm, but all but one of those were at a new golf course situated on former farmland.

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