

Cook disputes activist's pesticide science

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State University to put golf course pesticide use in the proper perspective.

It is difficult to respond to this kind of sweeping condemnation of golf course pesticide use. By combining a hodgepodge of miscellaneous claims with no apparent context, the author has created a scary image of impending doom. All I can do is ask some questions.

1. How can anyone fairly evaluate the relative intensity of pesticide use without factual information?

The amount of pesticide applied per treated acre is an argument that has been used for many years. This argument exaggerates and skews the actual use of pesticides in my opinion. For example, if a 150-acre planting of corn received a pre plant herbicide application at one pound of active ingredient (ai) per acre followed by two later applications of insecticide for corn earworm each at one pound of ai per acre, what would the statistics show? They would show a total of three pounds of ai per treated acre. They would also show a total of 450 pounds of ai applied to the corn crop.

If you had a 150-acre golf course with two acres of putting greens and those greens received six fungicide treatments at one pound of ai per acre plus two insecticide applications

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— Dr. Tom Cook

at one pound of ai per acre, what would the statistics show? Total pesticide ai per treated acre would be eight pounds. Total pesticides applied per 150-acre golf course would be 16 pounds of ai. Which site used the most pesticide? Per treated acre, the golf course did. Per site, the farm used 450 pounds vs. 16 pounds for the golf course. If I want to defend golf courses, I talk about total pesticide use for the entire area. If I want to disparage golf courses I talk about pesticide use per treated acre.

In reality, pesticide use varies dramatically from one golf course to another. Unless New York has official mandated reporting guide-

lines, there is no way the attorney general could accurately calculate the actual pesticide use on Long Island golf courses. He would have to invent his numbers by making numerous assumptions that may or may not be correct.

2. What conclusions can you draw from the GCSAA survey regarding health of golf course superintendents?

Are we to assume that the apparent increase in cancer is due to exposure to pesticides? Perhaps it is the natural consequence of people working in high-stress jobs who have poor general health habits including poor diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, sleep deprivation, etc. Add to that the emotional strain of trying to produce perfect playing conditions under all manner of weather-related stresses and it is probably surprising that superintendents don't have even more health problems. At many if not most golf courses, the superintendent isn't even directly involved in pesticide application and has probably no more exposure to pesticides than the general golfing public. I feel it is a giant leap to equate superintendent health issues with pesticide use. ■

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