



John Walsh
Editor

THE GREENER SIDE OF GOLF

Don't get me wrong; I'm not a tree-huggin' hippie who thinks pesticides are horrible and should be banned. And I'm not protesting golf course development because it disturbs the land and "ruins" wildlife habitat. But golf course superintendents, as a whole, can do a better job of being the environmental stewards the industry claims.

The mindset of many superintendents is to use as few pesticides as possible by having a sound integrated plant management program and managing water use better because it's good for turf, the bottom line and the environment. But there's still room for improvement.

Those at the 10th Golf & the Environment meeting last month in Anaheim seemed to think so, too. The event included key people from the golf industry (GCSAA, USGA, GCBA and ASGCA) and the environmental community (Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth). Both sides found common ground and understand each other better. The goal for both is to improve golf's compatibility with the environment, and there's no question the two sides are closer to that goal than they were 10 years ago.

Superintendents need to realize the importance of better environmental stewardship. I suspect some superintendents simply don't care, and some are too lazy. There also are many who care but are overworked, underpaid, don't have the time and are working for owners who could care less about being better environmental stewards. Yet, superintendents are the ones who can make the biggest difference at a golf facility. Superintendents should take the initiative and implement improved environmental standards before they're forced to do it through regulation.

Facilities can improve in areas such as plant protection and nutrition (more effective use), water management (less usage), waste management (generating less waste and recycling) and wildlife management (increasing habitat). Irrigation companies are doing their part by making products that manage water more efficiently. Pesticide manufacturers are coming out with safer and more effective products. Seed companies are providing new turfgrass varieties that are better for the environment. Architects and builders are part of the movement, too, thanks to better siting and erosion control processes. Research is part of it as well. The USGA and GCSAA are funding substantial environmental research. The GCSAA also is acquiring information to use as baseline data to document the environmental progress of golf courses.

If you're unfamiliar with the Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States – guidelines developed a decade ago – e-mail Paul Parker (pparker@msn.com) at the Center for Resource Management. Or, if you want to improve your environmental stewardship by implementing a comprehensive golf course environmental management plan, contact consultant Bill Bushman, director of Ecodesigns in San Antonio. He presented a thought-provoking seminar in Anaheim.

This isn't to say the industry isn't doing anything to better environmental stewardship. It's doing quite a bit, but it doesn't do a good job of communicating its successes. Because of that, it's easy for environmental activists to point the finger at it.

The industry has made great strides during the past 10 years regarding its compatibility with the environment, but there's still room for improvement. And there's no good reason why every superintendent and facility shouldn't be an active participant.

Maybe architect Bill Love put it best when he said, "If you don't understand the environment, you'll be out of the business."

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard.



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