

LEARNING FROM OUR NEIGHBORS

You may have heard by now that Ontario banned the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. Quebec has a similar law, and Alberta and Nova Scotia are eyeing their own. Ontario's ban went into effect on April 22, which was, not coincidentally, Earth Day. Golf courses are exempt from the ban, providing they adhere to a slew of new regulations.

I celebrated Earth Day this year by researching this column, including putting in calls to experts in Canada to learn more about Ontario's ban, how the golf industry views it and what golf course superintendents in the U.S. can do when the pesticide-banning bandwagon starts making its way south.

First, some background. Ontario's Premier Dalton McGuinty promised in late 2007 during his reelection campaign that he'd replace the patchwork of more than 30 municipal pesticide restrictions with a single law. In June the Ontario Legislature passed the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act. By November, the Ministry of the Environment released a draft regulation with 45 days for public comment. Less than six months later the new regulations are law. It's said to be the fastest a bill ever has been pushed through the system, says Mark Scenna, manager of business operations for Environmental Investigations Ltd., a Burlington, Ontario-based company that performs audits for the Ontario IPM Accreditation Program. Scenna is also the co-author of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association's Environmental Management Resource Manual.

The Canadian golf course industry is thankful for its exemption, though it's not thrilled with all of the provisions, especially one requiring golf courses to conduct annual meetings informing the public about their pesticide use.

As the Ontario Allied Golf Associations said in a memo to the Ministry of the Environment, "The argument that public meetings provide an opportunity for golf course management to inform the public assumes those in attendance wish to be informed."

As anyone who's ever sat in a local meeting about pesticide restrictions knows, that's usually not the case. Joe Public and anti-pesticide activists aren't interested in hearing about the

testing pesticide products undergo to become registered (which are even more rigorous in the Canada than in the U.S.), the efficacy of such products or the precision with which superintendents apply them. They don't care about IPM or that it's counter intuitive to assert that a superintendent who operates with a tight budget would use unnecessary amounts of very pricey products.

That's why the golf industry fears anti-pesticide activists will use the mandatory public meetings to resuscitate the emotional side of the issue year after year, or that disgruntled neighbors who are annoyed for any given reason will take the meeting off topic.

The bill was written in the interest of providing transparency about when, where and the amount of pesticides used; most of the industry believes that the other provisions sufficiently achieve transparency.

So how long before New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota or other states head down this road?

No one's sure, but because of the emotional motivation behind the new regulations, Scenna believes such restrictions could be enacted anywhere.

"This is not based on science," he says. "It's political.

Because of that, I'm sure it could happen anywhere if the right people are in power and are making good on a campaign promise."

His advice to superintendents in the States? Self regulate and document everything.

The reason the golf industry escaped Ontario's all-out ban was its solid IPM accreditation program, which had been voluntary. Scenna encourages associations at the state level to put such programs in place. The government likes when industries are proactive, and – as was the case in Ontario – rewards them accordingly.

Additionally, even though Scenna knows most superintendents practice IPM to do their jobs well, they don't chart their course.

"Documentation is lacking," he says. "Implement a structured documentation routine for your IPM practices – it's something you can always fall back on." GCI



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