

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

In the old Roman calendar the “ides” included the 15th of March, May, July and October, and the 13th of every other month. In Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, Caesar was warned to “Beware the ides of March.” We all know what happened to poor old Julius.

Today, the ides of March are fungicides, herbicides and insecticides, and there is no shortage of people and organizations running around filling the media with shouts of “Beware!”

The media doesn’t really care whether the warnings are true or not. Consider the disastrous Alar scare, the endless stories on Y2K and the end of the world as examples. Shocking headlines and controversy sell newspapers and pad TV ratings.

This “news” — not necessarily the truth — is the currency of today’s mass society. From survivalist crackpots and little old ladies hugging trees to radical Greenpeace warriors and Machiavellian schemes of global environmental control, the bleat goes on.

Reality lies in sound bites

In a media awareness presentation to the Florida GCSA Board of Directors in January, Tom Morgan, a Ph.D. in mass communications from Florida State University, expounded on his Theory of Reality in today’s world. It goes like this: “There are things that ought to be, and there are things we would like to be, but things are what they are.”

Pesticides ought to be recognized by the public for what they really are — safe, efficient tools when used according to instructions. We would like the media to print the whole truth about environmental issues and not just sound bites, but commotion sells and common sense is pretty dull.

Since things are what they are, pesticides are regularly lambasted in the media for shock value as poisons — not as plant medicines protecting food supplies and turfgrasses.

It’s tough for the variety of pesticide user groups to unite on what the common environmental message about pesticides ought to be — almost as tough as trying to spin Al

Time to Protect the ‘Ides’ of March

BY JOEL JACKSON



IT IS TIME FOR
PESTICIDE USERS
TO FORM A
COALITION AND
GRAB HEADLINES
OF ITS OWN

Gore as a wild and crazy guy.

(As an aside, I’m still trying to figure out if Gore is a crackpot, tree hugger or Machiavelli reincarnated, especially with book credits like “Earth In the Balance” to his name.)

You can always tell when a candidate, especially Gore, is about to hammer an environmental plank in the campaign. He dons a plaid shirt and stands in front of a forest. Too bad he can’t see the trees — but I digress.

Pesticide users face an uphill battle for a share of the headlines. Somehow, we have to crack the code with a compelling story to tell to get us into the cycle of news generation used so well by the activists:

- Activists protest something.
- Media covers and reports protest.
- The media covers public and political reaction to the protest.
- The media covers activists’ reaction to politician’s comments.
- Politicians introduce new laws to placate activists.
- Bureaucrats write rules to enforce law.
- Citizens have to abide by the rules.
- Activists move on to new cause and start cycle all over again.

Four hundred years ago, Machiavelli wrote, “He who controls communications, controls.” Today, Morgan says, “Chance favors the prepared mind. It is much better to manage issues and not crises.”

It’s time for pesticide users in the agricultural and horticultural industries to form a coalition based on common interests — and to tell a story that competes with the activists for headlines. If they don’t, there won’t be any “ides” left to use in March.

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