

Over the past two years, I have witnessed or been directly involved in meetings with federal, state and local regulators on issues like the overall Food Quality Protection Act process, Dursban and Namacur reassessments, and water restrictions.

The good news is that officials are listening. They appreciate the honest and open input by stakeholders. The bad news is that you and I know there are still people who violate some of the laws and labels and undermine those efforts.

When the GCSAA, state and local turf associations present the best-case scenarios of turf management to the Environmental Protection Agency, they talk about the progress we have made in environmental stewardship. They are not blowing smoke or giving false testimony — it's true.

But there are those who spoil the wonderful story we have to tell. I don't have actual numbers on those who still practice in the dark ages of turf management. But you and I know environmental scofflaws are out there. For the sake of our image, they must be stopped.

They exist out of ignorance, arrogance and greed. They exist through their own shortcomings or from being employed by owners and managers more concerned with profit than practicing safe turf management. The origins don't really matter; the resulting lawlessness must still be fought.

Those who carry the title of superintendent, golf professional or course owner can no longer wink at or ignore environmental responsibility. If they do, they are headed down a lonely path.

We cannot improve the image of superintendents, the image of the game or the credibility of our claims of progress in environmental stewardship in the court of public opinion as long as too many of our peers and their superiors refuse to acknowledge that the age of accountability is here.

The leaders in golf who sit with environmental activist groups and government regulators deserve credit for bringing good golf practices to the attention of those who have no

Stop Soiling Our Reputation

BY JOEL JACKSON



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knowledge of turf-management practices. These efforts do not deserve to be sabotaged by those who cut corners that can potentially result in harsh scrutiny.

I know of one such case that is taking place in one drought-affected state. While other superintendents are working with a regional water management authority to revise its restrictions rules, a course owner is ordering his superintendent to violate current rules to keep his course green during the drought. The owner is being fined, but the damage to our credibility is much more costly than his loss as we try to gain confidence and respect from regulators.

There is a strong bond among superintendents worldwide. They have so many challenges in common, and they appreciate the demands and accomplishments of their peers. As a group, they share information on problems and solutions unlike many others who are in competition in the marketplace.

But responsible members of the industry can no longer tolerate the blatant disregard by others in the business who refuse to accept the changing climate of the environmental debate. Can we afford to sacrifice our growing credibility with regulators by ignoring those who violate the common trust for short-term gains?

The slackers and stragglers who can't or won't keep up will be left behind to fend for themselves. Those who are trying to do the right thing for golf may soon be forced to disavow publicly those who arrogantly endanger everyone else's access to the tools they need to do their jobs. Otherwise, we become complicit in their crimes.

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