

The Scoop on Herbicides

Experts say tweaking old chemistries and refining control spectrums will fuel 2003 market

By Frank H. Andorka Jr.
Managing Editor

Superintendents across the country are sitting down with their owners to crunch the numbers and figure out a chemical budget for 2003, and herbicides are part of that number. With that in mind, *Golfdom* talked to several members of the herbicide industry to see what they think the market will look like in 2003. Here's what we learned:

Pre-emergent vs. postemergent

In what was widely considered by superintendents to be one of the wackiest weather years in history, postemergent herbicides gained ground over pre-emergent applications, says George Raymond, brand manager for herbicides and plant growth regulators for Bayer Environmental Sciences.

"During the time of year when people usually applied their pre-emergent products, the weather prevented them from doing so," Raymond says. "That left them with only one alternative: Treat the weeds as they appeared later in the year."

Pre-emergent herbicides still play a vital role as a weapon in superintendents' arsenals, but there is clearly a partial shift away to postemergent herbicides. Raymond expects the trend to continue as 2003 approaches.

BASF's William Strickland, marketing manager for herbicides and soil fumigants, disagrees with Raymond, however. He says advances in pre-emergent herbicides have made that segment more effective.



USGA/TODD LOWE

"The latest pre-emergent herbicides can be sprayed at much lower rates and cost less," Strickland says. "The postemergent market is shrinking. It won't go away, but it will continue to get smaller."

There is also a trend toward some superintendents in the North using pre-emergent products in the fall rather than in the spring, says Scott Eicher, senior product manager for herbicides for Dow AgroSciences.

"It makes more sense for superintendents to apply pre-emergent herbicides in the fall if they have the labor available," Eicher says. "You don't have to spend as much time or labor at the start of the season putting down herbicides, so your workers can do other tasks."

Rethinking labels

Strickland says he's looking at BASF's 2003 labels to make sure they display warning information clearly. He embarked on a review

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Experts expect new formulations of herbicides to focus on attacking regional weed problems, like the annual sedge pictured above.

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of BASF's warning labels to make sure they were clear and displayed prominently.

"We went back and looked at our labels to make sure all the 't's' were crossed and the 'i's' were dotted," he says. "We don't want people to have problems with our products."

Still, Strickland says chemical companies can put all the warnings possible on packages, but it doesn't matter unless superintendents and other users follow *all* directions on labels.

"We need to label them as clearly as possible, but end-users have to follow the application directions," Strickland says. "If users don't follow the guidelines and problems arise, it can send companies into a tailspin quickly."

Generics make some inroads

Jay Turner, product development manager for TopPro Specialties, says he saw a spike in the number of superintendents using generic herbicides in these economically trying times. Since TopPro produces primarily generic products, its business grew this year.

"In my travels around the country, I've talked to superintendents and distributors, and money is becoming a larger factor than in past years," Turner says. "Efficacy will always be the No. 1 determining factor for superintendents, but they're taking a longer look at generics. Superintendents should check university trials to verify the efficacy of new generic or post-patent products."

With more active ingredients coming off patents in the next few years, Turner believes there will be an explosion of generic herbicide formulations coming on the market in the next few years. "As long as they have the same level of control as the brand names, I think superintendents will continue to move in the direction of generics," he says.

Shift in schedules

The most surprising thing Joe DiPaola, golf market manager for Syngenta Professional Products, saw in 2002 was a shift in herbicide application patterns nearly 30 days later than

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Herbicides

“There are huge differences in herbicide efficacy depending on what region of the country you’re in.”

GEORGE RAYMOND,
BRAND MANAGER,
BAYER ENVIRONMENTAL
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usual. DiPaola found a familiar culprit for the shift: the weather.

“It was uncanny how the patterns shifted,” DiPaola says. “What we expected in February happened in March, what we expected in March happened in April and so on.”

DiPaola says he expects the patterns to return to normal in 2003 unless the weather makes a repeat performance. “We’re not looking for any surprises next year in purchase patterns.”

Focus on formulations

Though new chemistries won’t flood the market in 2003, different formulations of old chemistries should provide superintendents with new treatment options.

Raymond says companies are focusing on creating more specialty tools than in the past. New formulations will allow superintendents to focus their herbicide applications to meet specific problems.

“There are huge differences in herbicide efficacy depending on what region of the coun-



USGA/BUD WHITE

Herbicide application patterns, which shifted one month later than expected in some regions in 2002, should return to normal in 2003.

try you are in,” Raymond says. “What we see is a trend toward more regional tools to deal with different weeds.”

Owen Towne, business director for speciality marketing for Griffin LLC, says he sees a new class of chemistries — sulfonul-ureas — entering the market in 2003. The herbicides are a cost-effective way for superintendents to manage bermudagrass transitions.

“They will change the way superintendents manage their turf at that critical time of year,” Towne says. “Their low-dose, limited-application schedule will help superintendents be

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Towne also says some formulations of sulfonol-ureas will help Northern superintendents remove *Poa* from bentgrass greens.

Eicher says new formulations will narrow the spectrum of weeds they control. “With the focus on reducing the amount of wall-to-wall spraying superintendents will do, I think you’ll see more chemicals, but they will each be focused on a smaller number of plants,” he says.

Companies are also tweaking current formulations to allow superintendents to use lower rates of the product, DiPaola says. “Superintendents are expecting herbicides to be more accurate, so we’re working hard to dial down the rates,” he says.

Another opportunity for growth in the herbicide market is combination products, BASF’s Strickland says. More herbicides will be combined with fertilizers, reducing the time and

labor superintendents have to spend on their chemical applications.

“It’s better for superintendents if they can get more done with less labor,” Strickland says. “Companies are trying to provide them with the tools to do so.” ■

You can reach the author of this story, Andorka, at fandorka@advanstar.com

For more information on other herbicide products, see these companies:

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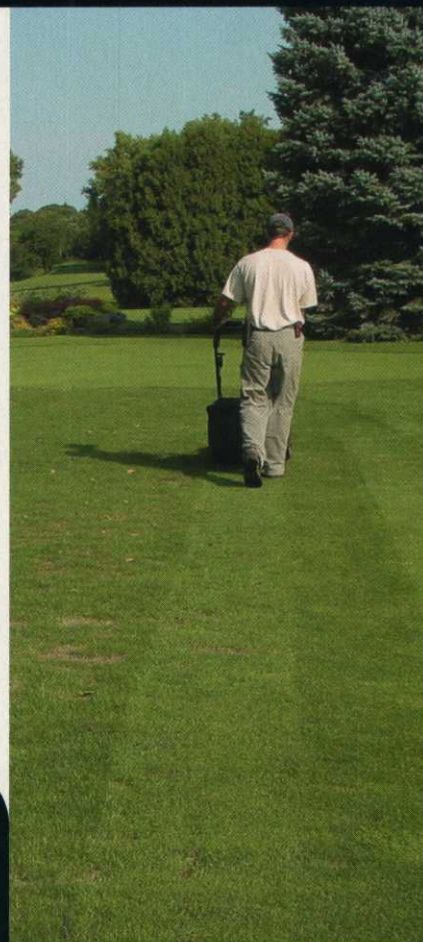
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