

Concerned

Superintendents fear possible affects of antipesticide regulations

BY SHANE SHARP

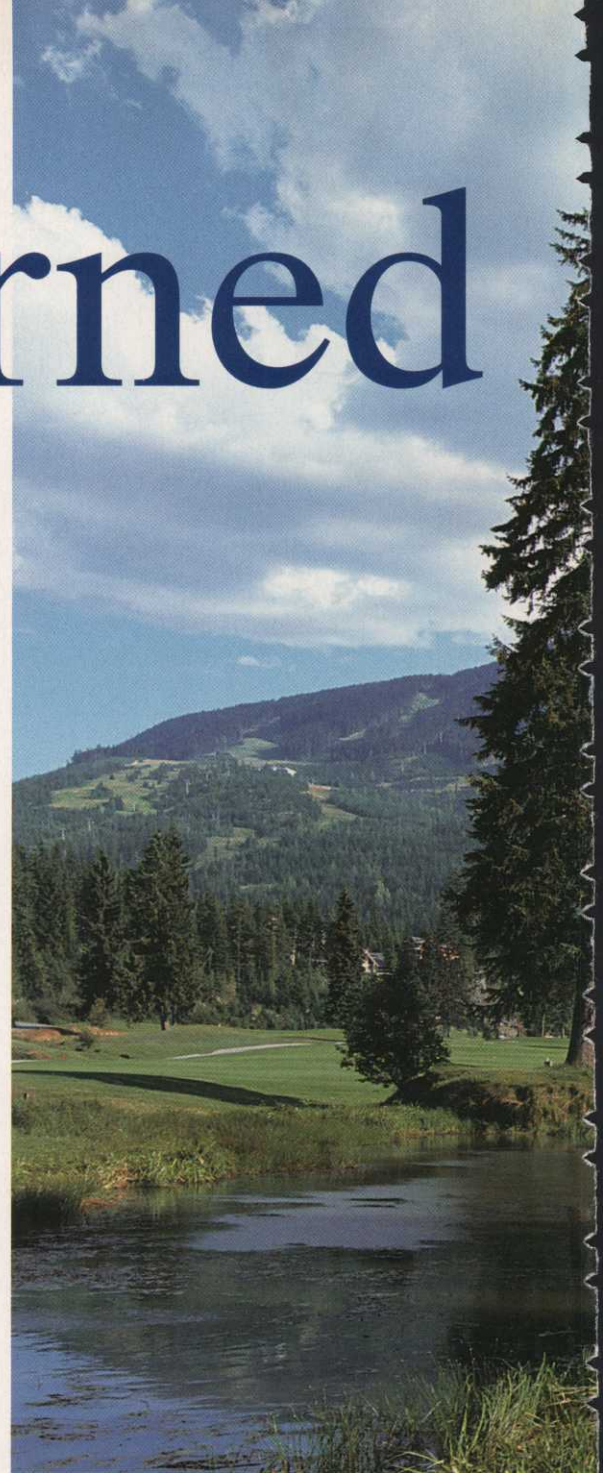
A 6,000-square-foot strip of brown grass on the 17th fairway at Erie Shores Golf & CC in Leamington, Ontario, roasts in the uncharacteristically hot Canadian summer sun. But all around it, lush and green turfgrass springs from the earth, waiting to cushion the fall of a well-struck tee shot.

The green portion of the fairway has been treated with pesticides. The sliver of ugly brown grass hasn't. The sacrificial lamb is necessary, says Erie Shores superintendent David Cours, should a 2001 Canadian Supreme Court ruling restricting pesticide use in residential lawn care make its way over from neighboring Quebec and on to the golf course.

"I've let the membership know what we're doing, and we are showing them what will happen without pesticides," Cours says. "Now, if we need it, we'll have 450 people to back us in court. It's not here yet, but we are preparing just to be safe."

The court case, known as the "Hudson ruling," allowed Quebec cities to ban the use of pesticides in residential areas if the substances were perceived as public health threats. To date, at least 50 towns in Quebec have passed ordinances either banning or restricting the use of pesticides in lawn care applications, including the trailblazing town of Hudson.

Although golf courses were not specifically noted in the Hudson ruling, the Supreme



Court decision potentially gives municipalities the right to restrict the use of pesticides on golf courses within their communities, says Teri Yamada, managing director of the Royal Canadian Golf Association's golf programs and services.

"The reason we're concerned and superintendents in other provinces are concerned is that other provincial municipal acts may be interpreted to allow restrictions, and then towns could decide to apply them to golf courses," Yamada says.

Superintendents throughout Canada are carefully monitoring the situation in Que-

in Canada



bec. If they weren't already losing sleep over the Hudson ruling, then a recent piece of legislation crafted by Quebec Environment Minister Andre Boisclair should make for some restless nights. The proposed provincial law would ban the use of 30 pesticides on public lands, including parks, schools, day-care centers and hospitals. Golf courses would also have to establish pesticide reduction plans by 2005 or face hefty fines.

At least one Quebec superintendent says his golf course is getting along fine despite the antipesticide legislation and rhetoric. Michael Bailey, superintendent at Whitlock GC in Hud-

son Heights, feared the worst when the Hudson ruling hit, but he says the exemption has enabled him to gradually reduce pesticide use while tinkering with new ways to grow green grass.

"It has been a learning curve for me," Bailey says. "There are more weeds out there than anyone would like to see, and we don't spray preventively. But I've learned which things work and which don't."

Bailey says a golf course pesticide ban would not drastically alter Whitlock GC's *modus operandi* since he and his staff have been in pes-

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If Canadian golf courses, such as Chateau Whistler GC in Victoria, B.C., brown out from disease and insects, they may lose their draw — specifically American golfers.

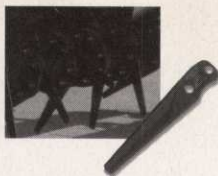
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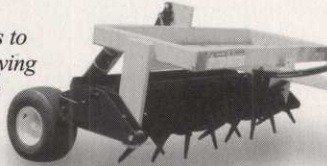
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Concerned in Canada

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ticide-reduction mode since the spring 2001. If anything, he sees the legislation as an attempt by the provincial government to wrestle the decision-making power back from municipalities.

"Actually, it would put it back in the provincial government's hands and create an even playing field for all golf courses," Bailey says. "However, the legislation is explicit that the goal is to go pesticide-free in Quebec."

In the meantime, what's a Canadian superintendent to do? The answer varies drastically by province. For now, any and all pesticide restrictions stemming from the Hudson ruling or the proposed law applies only to Quebec. But golf courses as far away as British Columbia are intently monitoring the goings-on back east and are organizing groups to lobby on their behalf.

"There is a huge amount of concern among superintendents everywhere," says Paul Robertson, superintendent of Victoria GC. "It would change the industry forever."

Robertson says Victoria, B.C., is acutely aware of the Hudson ruling, but that government officials have opted to stay out of the debate. Their rationale, while not explicit, is obvious if one reads between the lines: money. Both Victoria and British Columbia rely heavily on American tourist dollars to support resort meccas such as the Chateau Whistler GC and Banff Springs GC. If Canadian golf courses along the border brown out from fungi and harmful insects, American golfers may simply decide to stay put.

Yamada also points out that golf tournaments in Canada are a major source of revenue for charities. If courses are changed by the antipesticide laws, fund raising could take a major hit.

"We are in an interesting position because for years we (the RCGA) have worked with golf courses to reduce the amount of pesticides they used," Yamada says. "Now we're in the position of opposing an outright ban. The main concern is whether the municipalities have the expertise to determine how pesticides are best used. We should leave these decisions to those that have the expertise, and those people are at the provincial and federal levels."

According to Yamada, the pesticide wars could eventually trickle down into the United States, where San Francisco and Long Island have already drafted restrictive pesticide ordinances. It's no coincidence that American-based environmental groups like the Sierra Legal Defense Fund have jumped on the antipesticide bandwagon north of the border, she points out.

"Certain U.S. groups are looking at Canada as a shining example of how to deal with this issue," Yamada says. "There was a political will in Quebec to take on this issue, and now Quebec is out in front." ■

Shane Sharp is a free-lance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.