

It came to me recently that unless you are a sod producer, superintendent or sports turf manager, turfgrass ranks pretty low on your list of favorite plants. In that sense, turfgrass is the Rodney Dangerfield of the plant kingdom — it gets no respect.

Orchids are royalty. Roses are white-collar. Turfgrass, on the other hand, is decidedly blue-collar. Sure, we can dress up turfgrass in pin stripes and parade it on TV for millions to see, but the next week the golfers hack it up, ignore divots and ball marks, and drive golf cars through wet spots.

It's not enough that golfers take their *own* turf for granted in their lawns. The real rub comes from state and local regulators (and activists) who lay a large part of the blame for pollution on turf maintenance practices. You don't see these folks tackling vehicle emissions with ordinances like they do with turfgrass. Some counties in Florida are writing ordinances limiting the amount of turf that can be grown on new lots to 50 percent of the area. Why does our product take so much environmental grief when there are much larger threats out there?

The advocates of these restrictions say they will conserve water in the belief that this solves uncontrolled development's impact on water resources. You don't see these same people limiting the amount of air traffic and vehicles that traverse the county each day to reduce air pollution. Turf actually counteracts water and air pollution as a filter, but it *still* gets no respect. After all, it is underfoot, so why not just walk all over it?

Montreal is about to ban the use of all pesticides used to maintain the aesthetic appearance of turf and ornamentals. On the practical side, I'll give it a year until plant life starts turning brown and weeds begin to flourish before they start backing up — just remember that San Francisco learned the dangers of complete pesticide bans the hard way.

I'll bet Montreal isn't banning the use of chlorine in drinking water or swimming pools or the use of gasoline or diesel fuel. Talk about some dangerous products — but then turfgrass is only deemed to be “nice to have” and not essential.

I guess maybe only turfgrass managers

Turfgrass Is Not the Enemy Here

BY JOEL JACKSON



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appreciate the broad and sometimes even subtle benefits of turfgrass. They have been enumerated many times, and most apply to golf courses. They include:

- improving aesthetics;
- providing recreation;
- filtering air and water pollution;
- producing oxygen;
- recycling spots for effluent wastewater;
- reclaiming and restoring damaged areas such as landfills and brown fields;
- controlling erosion;
- increasing security with a clear field of vision around sensitive locations; and
- providing fire breaks in wooded suburban areas.

These factors are not usually considered when assessing a risk/benefit scenario of turfgrass against the zero-tolerance mindset of the antipesticide factions, no matter how few people have actually ever died from turf pesticides.

At a conference in Seattle recently, a regulator suggested artificial greens for area golf courses as one way to stem the flow of pollution into the salmon waters of the Northwest. During a tour, I walked on artificial soccer fields on the Microsoft campus. The pungent smell of crumb rubber topdressing in the warm spring afternoon made me wonder where the quality of our lives might be heading.

Meanwhile on the extensive Seattle waterfront sit thousands of pleasure boats moored three and four deep along every foot of dock, with their bilge pumps dumping gas and diesel directly into the water. As I watched this environmental catastrophe unfold before my eyes, it hit me yet again: Turfgrass really doesn't get the respect it deserves.

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