

The October issue of *Golfdom* resonated with me since almost 50 percent of my time is spent dealing with government relations issues. The five feature stories on environmental accomplishments and strategies were so on target that I felt compelled to follow up with a few observations, having participated in several stakeholder working groups on pesticides, water use, industry best-management practices (BMPs) and county golf ordinances.

The information gap between the real world of golf course management and the perceived image of chemical, fertilizer and water use by politicians, regulators, activists and even your own golfers is still so wide it's no wonder many people still think golf courses are environmental time bombs. While extremists with a zero-tolerance mindset will never want pesticides and fertilizers to be used anytime anywhere, I find that the majority of regulators and politicians realize they have a vested interest in getting it right.

Since it's difficult for regulators to get out from behind their desks, they rely on computer models loaded with data obtained from who knows what sources. Generally that data comes from agricultural applications and is applied in coarse, general terms to golf course acreage. About three years ago, I saw many jaws drop when I explained to a group during the Namacur re-registration sessions that a golf course generally treats only greens and tees (six to eight acres) with the product and not the entire 150 acres of the property. How were they to know unless we tell them?

We are making increased efforts to interact with EPA and local agencies to bring common sense and reality to address concerns about environmental issues. While proactive partnering is on the rise, we still tend to get involved as a defensive measure after someone has raised a concern over a perceived environmental threat. The good news is that once we sit down and trot out the decades of independent, peer-reviewed turf research that we helped to fund and explain how we really operate, any resulting rules and restrictions tend to be more of a matter of documentation rather than penal restriction to our procedures.

Reach Out ... And Influence Somebody

BY JOEL JACKSON



THE KEY IS TO
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I urge each and every local chapter of superintendents to reach out to regulators and give them tours golf courses. The Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association partners with the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association in an annual Spring Regulator Tour of Florida's agriculture and green industries. Watching these federal, state and local regulators learn about what we really can do is worth all the effort.

Facts and common sense can result in fair regulation. But it is one thing to talk about scouting, mapping and monitoring thresholds. It is fine and noble to talk about BMPs and integrated pest management (IPM). It's another thing to practice what some of our proactive peers have been preaching. Doing the right thing is all about consciously making small but significant changes in how we perform our turf management duties.

One way to go about getting assistance and documenting your actions is to join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. It's inexpensive and it's a plan that allows you to move at your own pace. Regardless, everyone can reduce pesticide usage annually, establish setbacks around water hazards and wetlands, conserve water, and clean up shops and storage areas. The key is to document the positive things you do and share them at least with your ownership, club members and golfers. Informing them can help spread the word in the community.

My hat is off to those superintendents who have chosen to go public with their proactive management practices. They are blazing trails for the rest of us. By doing the right thing, you give yourself, your club, your profession and the golf industry well-deserved credibility in environmental stewardship.

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