

You can slice it and dice it anyway you want. In the real world, however, superintendents don't set the tone and direction at courses — owners do. So when it comes to the environment, it doesn't matter how badly superintendents want to be good environmental stewards if they don't have their owners' support.

Golf can be a profitable business venture. But when owners take shortcuts and neglect safety, accidents can happen and thrust their golf courses (and by association, the whole golf course maintenance industry) into disrepute. Let's face it: Golf is already on the short list of evils that environmental activists want to eradicate from their perfect world. Irresponsible owners who encourage unsafe environmental policies just add fuel to that already blazing fire.

Given golf's high visibility, it certainly behooves an owner and his staff to take overt steps to demonstrate their intent to make a positive environmental contribution to the community — by deed, not just by word. If they leave the field to the activists, they're asking for trouble.

Activists only produce fear and distortion in communities. They don't produce habitats, jobs, recreational options, relaxation venues or revenues in the form of taxes. They use their tax-exempt donations to fuel their endless spin machines. It *is* spin, after all, because the science doesn't back them up. But unless owners use the available scientific evidence to create sensible environmental programs and combat the activists' messages, it doesn't do them any good.

Golf courses enjoy a range of resources. But whether a golf course charges \$125 a round or \$20 after 1 p.m., there's no excuse for an inadequate, filthy, and environmentally dangerous maintenance facilities and programs. A superintendent can't do it alone, however, because he isn't in a position to push and bully the owner into doing the right thing.

I heard a good line from Verdicon's Jeff Wharton, who recently talked about bringing a facility into compliance with local environmental regulations. He called the mentality of the owners the "If-Then Syndrome." He went on to say that many owners take the attitude

Owners Must Lead On Environment

BY JOEL JACKSON



IT DOESN'T MATTER
HOW BADLY
SUPERINTENDENTS
WANT TO BE GOOD
ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDS IF THEY
DON'T HAVE THEIR
BOSSSES' SUPPORT

that, "If something happens, then we'll take action." This shortsighted position puts owners and superintendents at risk. I'd ask the owners not to shoot the superintendent messengers if they try to bring these potential problems to their attention.

Taking a proactive environmental approach to golf course operations and voluntary compliance with best-management practices goes a long way in building regulatory cooperation, public trust and public awareness of the good that golf courses can do. In contrast, negative media stories about courses that disregarded regulations can only strengthen claims by activists that golf is a bad industry. That stain spreads to all golf courses instead of just the violators.

We are on the brink of a new dynamic with owners as the Golf Industry Show looms ahead next year in Orlando. Superintendents and owners will intermingle for the first time in general sessions, receptions and the trade show, if not in the classrooms. With luck, owners will hear how things ought to be done, should be done and why. Most of the attending owners will probably be more "choir" members who already know the right paths to take. Their challenge will be to reach out to more of their peers.

I hope some of the environmental commitments that superintendents have made with regulators over recent years will rub off on the owners.

They must take leadership roles in demanding exemplary environmental conditions and compliance with safety regulations. If they do, they will reap huge returns in positive public relations and money savings.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.