

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Towne rises with Phoenix

You may have noticed that Owen Towne, the former global business director of Griffin LLC Specialty Products Group, has a new company named Phoenix Environmental Care LLC. The



Owen Towne

company offers value-added post-patent products to the green and aquatic industries. Towne embarked on a press tour recently to promote his new company.

"The company will have a high level of dedicated technical support to meet the needs of the end-user," Towne said.

The company's products include Vital fungicide and proprietary Phoenix brands of chlorothalonil, propiconazole, glyphosate and bifenthrin.

Towne said his products are tailored to users who want good products at a good price. He said the words "Environmental Care" are used in the company's name because "we're really trying to create a benefit for the environment."

"Product stewardship will be a key focus of the new company," he added.

Several members of Towne's previous team with Griffin, including Patti Niewoehner, are now with Phoenix.

Par Aide celebrates 50 years

It's first product was a cast aluminum ball washer that retailed for \$18.75, and 50 years later Par Aide is still going strong. The golf course accessory manufacturer, founded by Joseph Garske in 1955 in Lino Lakes, Minn., is recognizing its golden anniversary as a second-generation, family-owned business.

Briefs continued on page 18

It'll Cost You to Keep It Green

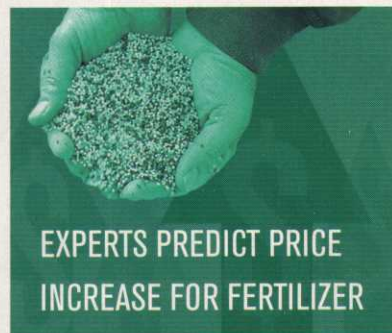
By Lynne Brakeman

Besides driving up fuel prices, worldwide demand for natural gas and petroleum products is making fertilizer prices higher.

Natural gas and petroleum provide the basic building blocks of fertilizer. Some experts are predicting as much as a 20-percent increase in the price of fertilizer this year.

On April 6 two senators introduced legislation specifically targeted at combating runaway natural gas prices. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) proposed legislation that, among other longer-term initiatives, would allow the Department of Interior to issue gas-only drilling leases. The senators say this strategy would be acceptable to environmentalists while opening up the potential of a gas-rich area in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) predicts natural gas demand will increase 2.2 percent in 2005 and 3.2 percent in 2006. At the same time, domestic natural gas production will only increase 0.5 percent largely because existing U.S. gas wells are becoming depleted. The result: The country has to import more natural gas and the price keeps climbing. The short-term outlook is dim.



EXPERTS PREDICT PRICE
INCREASE FOR FERTILIZER

According to The Fertilizer Institute's (TFI) testimony to Congress in March, the United States has lost 20 nitrogen fertilizer production facilities since 1998. Fifteen of those have closed for good and five plants are idle. This has resulted in a 35 percent decline in ammonia production in 2003-04 compared with 1998-99. In the same time period, U.S. nitrogen imports have increased from 6.11 million tons of nitrogen to 10.36 million tons. Although the fertilizer industry obviously focuses on the ag sector, the problems about which they are lobbying clearly impact the Green Industry.

"The current U.S. natural gas crisis is forcing domestic nitrogen fertilizer plant closures at an alarming rate," said Billy Pirkle of Royster-Clark Inc. on behalf of TFI and the Agricultural Retailers Association. "The cost of nitrogen fertilizer production has reached an all-time high, forcing many U.S. plants to shut down. Jobs are being exported to China, Russia, the Middle East and the Caribbean, as U.S. farmers are becoming increasingly dependent on foreign sources of crop nutrient fertilizers."