

God bless the first amendment, free speech, a free press and the public's right to know. Those rights, freedoms and liberties are often cited by the media to

inquire about, report on and to speak out on issues. But sometimes there's one thing missing — relevant fact. I know facts can be manipulated too, but they're better than innuendo and insinuations.

In February of this year, a newspaper in southwest Florida ran this story: "Weed killers hurting estuary, scientist says." In the story there was no factual evidence of any actual damage to the estuary. There were only inferences and innuendos that "the uses of certain herbicides pose a threat to seagrasses and other important aquatic life." The article was written based on a report given at a Charlotte Harbor Watershed Summit by a scientist commissioned by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida to do a study on pesticide loading.

Agriculture took the brunt of the blame, but lawn care, mosquito control and golf courses also got to share the blame for the presence or detection of five pesticides found in the estuary; where and exactly how much wasn't reported. The five were amethryn, atrazine, bromacil, norflurazon and simazine. No agriculture or green industry sources were quoted to provide any semblance of balanced reporting. It was what it was: ignorant reporting or a calculated hack job on pesticides.

Cutting to the chase, the only chemical labeled for golf course use of the five found in the study was simazine. In a Google search on simazine, I found this information easily: "Simazine rapidly breaks down chemically in water and does not bio-accumulate in fish."

By now I'm really ticked at all the generalizing and cheap shots being tossed around. Then came the clincher, and I quote, "But the toxicity of atrazine, the active ingredient in the popular weed killer Roundup, has never been calculated." Duh! Who was wrong, the speaker or the reporter?

I alerted allied Ag and Green Industries about the article. I wanted to see how they might want to respond. Given the factual goof above, most favored ignoring the story rather

Remiss Media Muddy the Waters

BY JOEL JACKSON



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than keeping it alive. In my media communications training, communications experts recommend contacting the media about incorrect information that has been written or broadcast. They keep files for future stories. So I e-mailed the reporter about the error and offered to be a source if related stories came up and he needed to check some facts.

He thanked me for the correction and apologized for the mistake, but his reason didn't relieve my disgust for the shoddy piece. His almost cavalier excuse was "it must have been the result of poor note taking!" I just hope the folks over at Monsanto are happy with his apology now that their product has been falsely linked to the contamination of Charlotte Harbor by faulty note taking. After recent media credibility fiascos from Jayson Blair's creative writing career at the *New York Times* and Dan Rather and CBS News' failure to verify facts, you'd think they would be trying harder to get it right.

Because of articles like this, I urge chapters to establish contact and working relationships with their local media outlets. Have reporters speak at meetings and/or give them tours of a golf course. It provides credibility for us and gives them at least a rudimentary education in pesticide, fertilizer and water use.

It is our responsibility to use best management practices to minimize and prevent pollution, and it should be the media's responsibility to provide fair and balanced reporting. If they want loyal readership and viewership, then they must provide unbiased clarity instead of continuous cheap controversy muddying up the issues. One more thing, media folks — ignorance of the facts is no excuse.

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