

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

The New Year is just beginning, and all you Frost Belt superintendents are hunkered down in your maintenance buildings rehabbing your equipment, attending educational conferences and maybe doing some tree work in the off-season. Sun Belt folks are just trying to mow and go and get out of the way of the snow bird golfers. As for those in the Transition Zone, they're lucky enough to get seasonal golfers and bad weather.

Welcome to our wonderful world of golf course maintenance.

But in general, the agronomic pace is slower everywhere even though we're busy grooming turf and rebuilding equipment. So it's a perfect time to examine our programs and budgets and to make plans to tweak both.

One thing that won't be going away come springtime will be the continual erosion of the arsenal of products available to use on turfgrass. We will likely see PCNB and MSMA disappear this year. The public comment periods on the EPA decisions have just ended, so the final word has not been issued. But I figure they are done. And Namacur is gone as of May, except for cleaning out the warehouse shelves.

I champion the use of sound science and a transparent review process to make sure our industry is not unfairly targeted as an abuser or misuser of these previously EPA-approved products. To that end, I propose that all golf course superintendents and turf managers adopt a game plan to reduce annual inputs of fertilizer, chemicals and water use by 10 percent this year.

This is not an original idea. I am borrowing it from my friend and colleague Gordon Witteveen, a Canadian superintendent who winters here in Florida. Gordon has written about making a New Year's resolution to reduce chemical applications by 10 percent several times during the years. In recent years, I have seen and come to know several superintendents who have reduced use. And when you consider the groundswell of environmental advocacy that we know won't go away, proactive moderation seems to be the right thing to do.

Pushing the Point of Diminishing Return

BY JOEL JACKSON



SELF REGULATING
PESTICIDES, WATER
AND FERTILIZERS
CAN SAVE MONEY,
MAN HOURS AND
REPUTATION WITH
NO AGRONOMIC
SACRIFICE

Granted, some of these recent actions were spurred initially by flat revenues and budget cutbacks, but when superintendents started skipping a fertilizer or chemical application here and there without any disastrous side effects, a new mindset was born. I'm not advocating abandonment of successful turf management programs that work for your location. I'm saying that what works or is necessary one year is not necessarily what needs to be done the next year.

Do you need a pound of nitrogen, or will three-quarters of a pound suffice? Do you need to apply pre-emergent herbicides to the whole rough or just a few passes closest to the fairway? Can monitoring and scouting and spot treatments of hot spots replace blanket treatments of fairways and slopes? Can you skip one complete fertilizer application in the warm months?

People are doing these things. They are saving money on product and labor. These are conscious decisions based on observations of turf appearance, clipping yield and threshold damage or infestation assessments. Annual applications of some pesticides are being stretched out to every-other year based on residual activity of some new products.

As the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conducts its series of golf course environmental profile surveys to provide baseline data for the industry, it's a good time to determine if programs and products — specifically pesticides, fertilizers and water use — can be cut 10 percent in 2007. It is the environmentally responsible thing to do at a time when we need to show leadership in that arena.

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