

There's no doubt we're victims of stereotyping. A recent example is activist groups lumping fertilizers in a group known as major pollutants. In return, we lump these environmentalists into a group of righteous, self-serving, misinformed do-gooders.

However, if we stop generalizing, we see environmental groups like Audubon International reaching out and working with us on an international scale. The organization learns our needs, helps us reduce our inputs and shows us ways we can achieve the same results. It's called cooperation. There are many similar efforts with water-management districts, local wildlife refuges and others who work with local chapters to educate each other about best management practices.

I remember the time I represented the golf and leisure industries at an event by the South Florida Water Management District's Task Force on Water Conservation. I was introduced to a woman, who upon noticing the golf course superintendents association title on my badge, rolled her eyes in a dismissive oh-no-you're-one-of-those looks. I immediately lumped her into that self-righteous group.

About a month later, I was invited at the 11th hour to give a presentation on golf and water use. Fortunately, I already had a PowerPoint presentation of the subject on my laptop. I was ready to tell our story with a few tweaks and updates the night before.

I couldn't help but notice the priceless looks of surprise on some environmentalists' faces when I showed them the golf industry's water-use numbers compared to other major users of water, especially homeowners. I also told them about the golf industry's use of reclaimed water, how modern golf course design features minimize irrigated turf, projects where out-of-play areas were converted to native areas, and computerized-control irrigation systems. It's amazing what a little factual education can do to destroy stereotyping.

How many times have we been guilty of lumping and clumping groups, such as golf pros, vocal members, chapter cliques, high-budget private clubs, municipal goat ranches,

Time to Stop the Stereotyping

BY JOEL JACKSON



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snake oil and bugs in a jug? The reason I bring up some of our own internal off-hand lumping is that we have folks within our own ranks who cut corners, ignore labels and violate regulations.

Have you ever heard of someone applying ag-grade pesticides in clear violation of the label to save money? Ever mixed or applied chemicals without wearing the proper personal protective equipment? Ever see a mix load or wash rack area drain into a ditch or canal leading to other water bodies? Ever see a chemical storage room with wooden shelves? Though in the minority, these things still happen, and these potentially rotten apples can spoil the whole barrel lumped as golf courses.

It's hard enough to explain to politicians and regulators about the fate of fertilizers and pesticides when properly applied to turfgrass to try to avoid well-intended but totally non-science based ordinances. We don't need horror stories about misapplications and safety violations on the six o'clock news to add to the stereotyping stampede.

We can't escape the wave of environmental issues that are shaping our world, and the Gulf oil spill has only magnified and intensified the scrutiny of any industry that uses potential pollutant products. Look for the pressure for more bans and regulations to ramp up even more.

However, the great thing about most superintendents is they're very creative, analytical, versatile and pragmatic. They find ways to solve problems using science, networking and imagination.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if one day soon the media and the public lumped us into a group predominantly known as environmental stewards?

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