

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Rounds down 3 percent for the year

Golf rounds were down 2.9 percent in May compared to the same month in 2009, according to a survey of 3,870 courses by Golf Datatech. Rounds are down 3 percent for the year.

Rounds were down substantially in the West, up to 17.5 percent in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. Rounds were up 8.2 percent in the New England area in May, and they're up 10.1 percent in that region for the year.

Green shoot for the golf economy

Golf may be slow in much of the country but industry vendors remain committed to the game in North Carolina and South Carolina. Commercial suppliers have come out early and strong in support of this year's Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association Conference and Trade Show in November in Myrtle Beach, S.C., according to a Carolinas GCSA news release.

Nearly 250 exhibit booths, or more than two-thirds of those available, have already sold even though the event is still almost five months away. That number exceeds sales for the same time last year, even though registration opened nearly a month later this time around.

"This is a great show of confidence in the game in our region," says Carolinas GCSA Executive Director Tim Kreger. "For so many of our vendors to commit so heavily so far in advance says something about their faith in the game here and the men and women who present the courses we play on."

The Carolinas GCSA's annual event is the largest regional conference and trade show for superintendents in the country. ■

More Than a Buzzword

BASF EMBRACES SUSTAINABILITY
IN ITS BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

The big buzzword in agriculture, which has filtered down to the golf course maintenance industry, is "sustainability." Then again, the "S" word seems to be the buzzword in just about every industry these days.

Many companies that supply equipment and chemicals to the golf course maintenance industry have grasped the sustainability concept. One of the companies, BASF, recently held a media summit in Chicago to discuss sustainability. The two-day event, held in June, focused on sustainability in agriculture and turfgrass maintenance, as well as other matters pertaining to the issue.

Jan Buberl, who assumed the role

of BASF's director of specialty products last October, told *Golfdom* that golf course superintendents are aware of sustainability, even though they might refer to it as another term.

"It's our job to make them aware and conscious of the concept," Buberl said. "We want to know what we can do and what we can offer as a company to help in the situation."

Superintendents may be resistant to sustainability, especially if they don't understand its nuances.

"It's our job to make them more comfortable with it, and it's an educational process," says Buberl says, who stresses that superintendents must be educated about the balanced approach of sustainability, which will allow them to do their jobs better in the long run.

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What They're Saying About *You*

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS LIKE BEYOND PESTICIDES SPREAD A BAD MESSAGE ABOUT PESTICIDES **By Nicole Wisniewski**

As golf course superintendents, you may be faced with questions regarding pesticides and the effectiveness of the tools you use daily. It's important to be aware of "what you're up against" when it comes to the information your customers may be getting from groups who oppose the use of pesticides.

In May, the 28th National Pesticide Forum, "Greening the Community," was held by Beyond Pesticides in Cleveland. During the opening session, "Pesticides 101," Caroline Cox, a Beyond Pesticides board member and research director for the Center for Environmental Health in Oakland, Calif., outlined the "10 Reasons Not To Use Pesticides," renaming her session to clarify her message.

Here are a few of the points this organization is spreading to the general public:

► **Pesticides don't solve pest problems.**

"If pesticides really solved pest problems, we wouldn't use them repeatedly," Cox explained. "Every year in the U.S., a billion pesticides are used. The amount isn't going down."

► **Pesticides are hazardous to human health.** Three hundred million pounds of cancer-causing pesticides and 150 million pounds of pesticides that cause reproduction problems like miscarriages or birth defects are used annually, Cox told the group.

► **Pesticides cause special problems for children.** "For their size, children

drink more water and eat more food than adults do," she said. "Their play exposes them to pesticides. They do somersaults on the lawn and they sprawl out on the carpet to read a book. All of these things increase their exposure to pesticides."

Kids are also growing and developing, she added. "If they're exposed to pesticides when they're at critical stages of growth or development and their growth changes, this is something they have to live with for life. For instance, some common pesticides appear to affect the developing brain so a child's brain will be different when [he or she] grows up."

► **Pesticides contaminate water and air.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's

National Monitoring Program found 57 pesticides in public drinking water samples in 2009, and the U.S. Geological Survey found pesticides in 90 percent to 100 percent of rivers and streams they tested in 2006. After stating these facts, Cox concluded that "pesticides used on lawn and roadsides do end up in urban streams and rivers."

► **Pesticides are hazardous to fish and birds.** "We share the planet with other living things and they pay the price as a result of our pesticide use," Cox said, adding that 100 million pounds of pesticides per year kill fish, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

► **Pesticide health and safety testing is conducted by pesticide manufacturers.** "The

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Environmental groups are spreading the word that pesticides are just plain evil. Superintendents need to take a stand.

Off The Fringe

He's Got Game

BUT GREGG BRENINGMEYER SAYS
HE NEEDS TO PLAY GOOD GOLF
TO CONDUCT GOOD BUSINESS

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Gregg Breningmeyer is a fine golfer. But he'd better be, because he says he has to be.

Breningmeyer, group director of sales and marketing for John Deere Golf, is a 7-handicap player who used to be an 18-handicap player four years ago and even higher before that. Because of his job — he plays a

lot of golf with John Deere Golf clients on the course — Breningmeyer worked hard to improve his game on his own dime.

"Frankly, I dedicated myself to getting better because I was embarrassing myself," Breningmeyer says. "I was doing my business relationships

more harm than good by playing poorly."

Breningmeyer travels frequently and all over the world. He has played golf in

places that a lot of people have never heard of. And most of the people Breningmeyer plays with, of course, are associated with golf courses as owners, general managers, superintendents and in other capacities. Most are very competent players. So you can see why Breningmeyer wanted to be as good or better than his playing partners.

"Think about it from a purely business relationship: Where else can you get a customer's undivided attention and time for five hours than the golf course?" Breningmeyer asks. "But you don't want that time to be torture, or you won't get another five hours with that customer."

"That's what drove me to get better," he adds. "Plus, I love the game."

Funny thing, Breningmeyer says he has closed many deals with clients on golf courses without even talking business. "It's because I went out and made friends with them and played golf with them, and we had a good time together," he says. "That alone pushed the deal in my favor."

"This is a relationship-driven business," he adds. "But golf sales is relationship selling on steroids. That's why I spent my own money and found myself a coach and told him, 'Turn me into a good golfer in a year.'"

Indeed, a 7-handicapper is a pretty good golfer. ■

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BUZZWORD *Continued from page 6*

Stefan Marcinowski, a member of BASF's board of executive directors, said BASF has created a forum to discuss agricultural sustainability and practical solutions to help farmers with the concept.

"Farmers have a tremendous responsibility to produce more than ever while continuing to protect the environment for future generations," Marcinowski says. "Our conversations with representatives from stakeholders throughout the value chain will help to bring together the many visions of agricultural sustainability to a practical point of what growers need from all of us."

During his presentation during the summit, Markus Heldt, president of BASF Crop Protection, said new pesticide packaging will help farmers use pesticides safer and faster. It's safe

to assume the same holds true at the specialty products level.

While it's a buzzword now, Buberl expects "sustainability" will turn into something much more.

"We're convinced it's [for real]," he says.

To BASF, sustainability is a "journey" and a "commitment," Buberl says. There will always be new challenges in nature, including new pests and disease, and sustainability will always play a role.

"For us, it's a business principle and a journey that doesn't have an end point," he says.

One thing is for certain with BASF. The company will not remove its tagline, "The Chemical Company," from its logo. While sustainability is about protecting the environment, chemicals play a safe role in doing that, Buberl believes.



BASF's Jan Buberl says "sustainability is a business principle and a journey that doesn't have an end point."

"It's in our DNA, it's at our core," Buberl says of the tagline. "And it's our job to explain what we do and make more people comfortable with it." ■

PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

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SAYING *Continued from page 8*

government does not test pesticides — they ask companies that make them to test them,” Cox said. “If you profit from a product and test it, isn’t there a built-in conflict of interest?”

► **Pesticides are hazardous to pets.**

“A good way to talk to people about pesticides is talk to them about pets,” Cox offered the group, adding that the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported more than 30,000 pesticide-poisoned pets in a single year (2005). She also pointed specifically to the use of lawn care herbicides as a reason for the increased risk of pet cancer.

► **Pesticides have too many secrets.** Pesticide ingredients are divided into active and inert, Cox explained, “so you wouldn’t know exactly what chemicals were used on your block because a

“We share the planet with other living things and they pay the price as a result of our pesticide use.”

— CAROLINE COX

good percentage of them could be inert and not listed on the label.”

Do yourself — and your industry — a favor and become educated about the true benefits of pesticides and be prepared to speak knowledgeably when faced with questions regarding their harmful effects. ■

Wisniewski is editor in chief of Landscape Management, Golfdom's sister publication.

“Quotable

“It’s important to remember that we’re in the customer service business. We have to work with our customers and the owners to tell them what we’re doing.”

— Mike Morris, certified superintendent of Crystal Downs Country Club in Frankfort, Mich., on the realities of being a superintendent in 2010.

“The mutual goal of the USGA and Pebble Beach was to provide firm, smooth, and fast putting greens to test the skills of the best players. Cosmetics and appearance were not high on the priority list.”

— Pat Gross, U.S. Green Section southwest region director, on the “mottled” greens at the U.S. Open

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