

2,4-D Politics: How To Win In An Impossible Setting

By Russel R. Weisensel

After the seizure-prone son of a Vietnam veteran suffered a seizure across the street from where a Madison, Wisconsin parks crew had sprayed 2,4-D, Madison's mayor ordered an immediate stop to the compound's use. An alderperson set up a press conference with the boy's mother, and on the same day a resolution was introduced to make the mayor's temporary ban permanent.

The first hearings on the resolution were before the City Public Health Commission which unanimously recommended the ban, and before the Commission on Environment which also recommended the ban. It is interesting to note that the Public Health Commission had absolutely no medical evidence relating either to the incident or to 2,4-D submitted as a part of their record.

Following these actions, the Wisconsin Agri-Business Council was made aware that a resolution had been introduced and was about to be referred to the City Council with two recommendations for passage. Facts from the Agri-Business group were sent to all members of the Madison City Council. One additional chance for a public hearing was before the Madison Parks Commission.

The Agri-Business Council contacted many groups who were using, and knowledgeable, about 2,4-D. For the first time the meeting was jammed with other than Vietnam Veterans Against the War, environmental organizations, and concerned University of Wisconsin students.

Agriculturalists talked about the 35 years of safe usage in Wisconsin. Agronomy and horticultural professors from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University talked about not only 2,4-D's safety record, but also its benefit to the consumer and home owner. A representative from a lawn care firm noted the number of doctors with young families who were using his weed control service. A Vietnam veteran with four healthy children noted that both his father and his father-in-law

used 2,4-D on their farms. The veteran, who regularly used 2,4-D in his job as groundskeeper of a golf course and who had been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, stated he felt the herbicide's use was one of the reasons he could address the group tonight. Because he rode shotgun on supply convoys through Viet Cong territory, he felt the wartime defoliation was necessary for survival.

WHAT'S NEEDED?

Facts

Warm Bodies

Coordination

Persistence

More Persistence

The Parks Commission opposed the ban by a vote of 7 to 1. The resolution went back to the Commission on Environment. Again the Agri-Business Council made certain that a number of people with good information were present to make statements. The environmental Commission reversed its action on the total ban and adopted a city park staff report which recommended a reduction in the use of all herbicides, but not a total ban and not a condemnation of one particular product.

Prior to action before the Madison City Council, each Madison area Agri-Business Council member was furnished with additional information on 2,4-D. Our members were asked to contact their alderpersons and any other alderpersons they knew.

Following a lengthy debate, and in spite of a location in the City of

Madison with its basic anti-chemical bias, the City Council adopted the park staff report and killed the total ban by one vote.

One hard fought victory, however, does not settle the issue. Additional hearings on 2,4-D's use are taking place because "D" has been detected in one of Madison's lakes at 1.9 parts per billion.

Other Wisconsin areas also are attempting bans. In a quick action in the spring of 1983, the City Council of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, by a vote of 7 to 5, banned the use of 2,4-D on city playgrounds, athletic fields, and school grounds.

The ban was supported by a Vietnam veteran who now breaks out in a rash when working in his garden because, he believes, 2,4-D was used by a previous owner; and by an expectant mother who stated to the Common Council, "I don't think you people here want to be responsible for the death of my child." In Stevens Point, as is often the case in smaller communities, the issue went through very fast and there was not time to organize factual appearances to counter the emotional arguments. Careful and continuous monitoring of governmental actions at all levels is imperative if the use of 2,4-D is to be continued. Persistence in contacts with elected officials is absolutely necessary; with the best contact being an informed local resident.

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- CREATES A TRUER PUTTING SURFACE
- IMPROVES WATER INFILTRATION RATE
- HELPS CONTROL WEEDS—INCLUDING POA ANNUA
- MATCHES USGA SPECIFICATIONS

— TYPICAL DISTRIBUTION —

MESH	MM	% RETAINED
30	0.60	0.2
35	0.50	0.8
40	0.42	3.4
50	0.30	28.0
60	0.25	25.9
70	0.21	23.5
100	0.15	18.0
140	0.10	0.2

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