



WE CANNOT TAKE THIS SITTING DOWN

By Monroe S. Miller

Nothing made his New England blood boil quicker than injustice. "I can take umbrage, I can take the cake, I can take the A train, I can take two and call me in the morning. But I cannot take this sitting down," said Hawkeye Pierce from the swamp. The Army's most famous doctor, stationed at the M.A.S.H. 4077th, indirectly gave us some advice we need to listen to. The time has come for us to stand up to the panic merchants, environmental zealots and toxic terrorists. And we'd better do it soon or we will not be able to do our job of managing fine golf turf. More sad than that will be the fact that our environment won't prosper from their mistaken efforts and our society most definitely will suffer. We cannot take this sitting down.

Reactions need catalysts to quicken them or even to get them started. The spate of incidents in the past five or six months should have the catalytic effect of a ten pound hammer rapped on our collective heads. From the national attention of the Daconil incident to the stupid article in GOLF magazine to the misery of the Milorganite affair and a hundred and more local incidents across the country, the use of agricultural chemicals and pesticides on turfgrass is under attack. There is, of course, the greater issue of the use of these products *at all* in agriculture. But that issue is so enormous and immense that we cannot let it consume us; we surely need to lend support when we can, but dealing with our own crop will take most of the effort we can muster.

So, what to do? Well, here are some essential elements that I feel will have to be addressed by our industry:

1. Primary and fundamental is the continuation of safe use of pesticides. There is no room for even the slightest glitch. Materials must be used by label instructions; applicators must be properly trained. Safety is absolutely paramount. All necessary and appropriate licenses must be held. These are

critical items involved in the well-being of our employees and our players. In addition to all of the overwhelming safety reasons is a trick used by "environmentalists". They like to take a single and isolated incident, blow it out of proportion and extrapolate it across the board to all users, all chemicals and all golf courses. The unfortunate thing is that it works for them. So we just cannot afford to give them any publicity opportunities.

To this end we must be relentless in our educational efforts. You'll see more and more discussion of pesticide issues and use in the GRASS ROOTS. I hope that in a year from now we'll include the subject on our monthly meeting program. Education is the principal reason the WGCSA exists and this topic(s) needs to be addressed with even more frequency and depth.

2. We need to enlist the support, participation and help from that enormous majority of scientists who know that many, if not most, of the "scientific" claims of environmental extremists are false and worthless. A perfect example of this need and how well it works was shown during the recent Milorganite affair. The guilty party turned out not to be Milorganite but rather one Benjamin Brooks. Brooks is a neurologist at the UW-Madison and director of the ALS clinical research center on campus. Whether he likes it or not, or whether or not he'll admit it, he dragged MMSD through the media gutter and had Milorganite killing people, *until* a meeting in Madison on Thursday, February 19. It was at that meeting that he was confronted by individuals with training comparable to his. Brooks was a low flying duck and was shot down by fellow scientists who pointed out his flawed thinking and total lack

of reason and the resulting harm he had done. Some implied negligence and incompetence on Brooks' part. Dr. Alfred A. Rimm, an epidemiologist with the Medical College of Wisconsin, told Brooks at that meeting: "I sort of feel that you have found a product guilty of murder, and it's totally innocent." He also accused Brooks of "shooting from the hip". Henry Anderson, a chronic disease epidemiologist with the State Division of Health, told Brooks: "Associating the disease with Milorganite was premature". Dr. Patricia Murphy, an epidemiologist with the U.S. EPA told Brooks: "There is no evidence to indicate an increased incidence in ALS in Milwaukee County or Wisconsin." She also told him there is no scientific basis for linking Milorganite to the disease. Henry Anderson, again to Brooks: "It's premature to connect ALS and Milorganite." And finally, Dr. Henry M. Golberg, a Milwaukee physician, said, "No scientist here (at the meeting) feels there is any connection between Milorganite and ALS." Dr. Rimm pointed out that Brooks was a neurologist and not an epidemiologist and that epidemiologists had "a lot of trouble" with people like Brooks who wanted to do their own epidemiology.

Although the damage had been done prior to this meeting (my guess is that it will take MMSD years to recapture lost sales; I've an answer to that, later), the entire issue was dropped; it was dead. Why? Because Brooks had been made to look like an idiot by his peers. The media figured out that there was no story. If we can enlist this kind of backing when the need arises, our worries about manifestations of extreme proposals would be greatly reduced.

So, why is it that so few speak up in protest to the charlatans and frauds that present themselves as environmentalists? Although the answers are subject to some speculation, I don't feel they are all that hard to figure out. I've had the good fortune to know quite a few university faculty members over the years - as a student, as neighbors and friends, and as Club members. My observations tell me

that, as a group, they are somewhat reserved, thoughtful and deliberate people. Their training does not necessarily include public debate. Dealing with fanatic, one-sided, emotional and rabid environmental extremists is an acquired skill many professors and physicians do not have. A good scientist realizes that good research involves a lot of time, effort and reflection. He is generally unwilling to reach quick or premature conclusions. You won't find them looking at data they didn't generate and then giving a media person a conclusion. Unlike the example of Benjamin Brooks, good investigators will not pontificate on subjects out of their specialty.

And my guess is that, since they are human, there is some inherent fear of media people. Scientists have no control of quotes, which are frequently out of context, or over what finally appears on the six o'clock news. Then, there has to be the anxiety of being asked irrelevant questions. "Who funds your research?", is a good example of a question whose answer could be misconstrued.

Those problems notwithstanding, we must convince our friends in research positions to assume a higher visibility in dialogue concerning the environment. The results are predictable, just as in the Brooks incident. We need to appeal to their sense of duty - misinformation disserves them as well as us. The public needs to know the unbiased truth and they can hold the keys to that - their work and their credentials. As far as dealing with media types, I guess we simply need to convince some to try to acquire that skill. Maybe selecting spokesmen could be a part of the answer; whatever route is chosen, we must not try to fight the media but rather to join them.

Dr. Leo Walsh on occasion writes a letter to the editors of the Madison papers, sharing his views on particular issues. This is a great example to follow; we need to do more of that. It really works in the arena of public education.

3. Our cause - the continued safe use of agricultural chemicals on our golf courses - can only benefit if we learn to understand the motivation of some journalists and publications that like to focus on environmental aberrations. Notice I

didn't say environmental issues; I'm talking about those reporters and their journals or papers that like to hype isolated incidents into sensational stories. Again, since it is fresh in our minds, let's look at the Milorganite incident. The false alarm raised by Brooks received fairly even play in Madison. The Capital Times had one small front page story and the State Journal kept it from the first page entirely. That was pretty much true around the state. In Milwaukee, the Journal was reasonable. But the Sentinel - it was disgusting. My judgement is that they were clearly peddling fear based on a local incident. It was pretty obvious to me that impartial reporting took a back seat to selling newspapers. I would love to see their newsstand sales during that period - safe bet they were up significantly. The front page of the February 6 issue was dominated by red ink - the hot color of anger and rage - and across the width of the paper above the headline (which was about Milorganite) were three bar graphs showing the heavy metal content in Milorganite. They were also done in red ink. Really, it was a classic example of selling bad news to the public. Sad that it works, for awhile, anyway.

The risk the Sentinel (and others) runs is crying "wolf" too often. Those of us following the story soon realized their obvious bias and ignored the paper, neither purchasing nor reading it.

What's needed here, for us, is just exactly what I spelled out for scientists. Write letters to newspaper and journal editors. Did any of you write a newspaper during the Milorganite crisis? Neither did I. We should probably select our best people to speak for us to the media. We should offer articles explaining benefits of pesticides and agricultural chemicals. Simply put, we need to participate more. It will not be easy; good news is boring and bad news is big. But never forget the wisdom in the title of Ben Wattenberg's excellent book: "The Good News Is The Bad News Is Wrong". That should be our slogan in these matters.

4. It seems obvious we may have to spend some money. The WGCSA belongs to the Wisconsin Agri-Business Council, as we should and must. But how many clubs

belong? One that I know of (Maple Bluff), currently. But soon there will be two since I am going to follow my own advice and Tom Harrison's example. Will some of the other 300 plus golf courses join, as well? The WABC and the FROWT Coalition are the only full-time people monitoring hearings and legislation that impacts on pesticides. Russ Weisensel does a yeoman's job, but it takes money, big money. We should convince our clubs to each come up with a \$50 donation to help Russ keep on the watch for us.

We may even have to or want to hire expert testimony, on occasion. Qualified people are available, but that will cost money. Let's be prepared to make some *serious* financial commitments, if the need arises.

5. Our professional associations need to be involved. The GCSAA, in our case, absolutely must posture itself better for responding to aggravating assaults like the GOLF magazine incident, as well as the major league activity that goes on at the national bureaucratic level (e.g. EPA and USDA). Right now there is too much concern about lipstick items; we'd better get geared up or we are going to get hammered by surprise. What better reason to exist, as a professional group, than to deal with these large environmental issues?

At the state level, Bill Roberts is doing his work on behalf of the WGCSA. In the past few weeks he has attended lengthy meetings of the STEWARD committee and travelled to represent us at an Agri-Business Council meeting and at a hazardous waste meeting. He's concerned that our agenda, as it relates to environmental concerns, is heard and considered. Miller and Harrison are doing their parts, on the WGCSA's behalf, on the FROWT Coalition Board. These roles must be maintained. Future WGCSA officers need to realize that this is a new aspect of those positions.

6. Industry has a critical role to play. Their product testing must go the extra mile; they need to be able to assure us, with all confidence, that their products are safe to use. And as Gayle Worf pointed out to me in a recent conversation, manufacturers and formulators are going to have to be more willing to share

product data and information if they expect researchers and investigators to defend the use of their agricultural chemicals as being safe.

7. I can recall from the phenoxy herbicide ban hearings in the legislature, almost fifteen years ago, some words from an out-of-state "environmentalist": "Sue the bastards." That may be what we'll have to do, when all else fails. Witness the FROWT Coalition suit against the Town of Casey in

Washburn County - the suit was a last resort. None of us enjoys litigation, but we need to realize that situations may present themselves where it is the best option to pursue.

8. Finally, it is the smart person who seizes on dialogue rather than confrontation. There is a lot of wisdom in the old saw that says you can get farther with sugar than vinegar. It applies through life and we should not forget that. Confrontations can, too often, carry high

risk. It may well be that we need also to face up to the fine art of compromise; the options to middle ground can be completely unacceptable.

We are definitely in the midst of dynamic and changing times in the pesticide issue arena. We cannot afford to be our own worst enemy; we need to work diligently to protect our rights of continued safe use of agricultural chemicals. We cannot afford to take these assaults sitting down.

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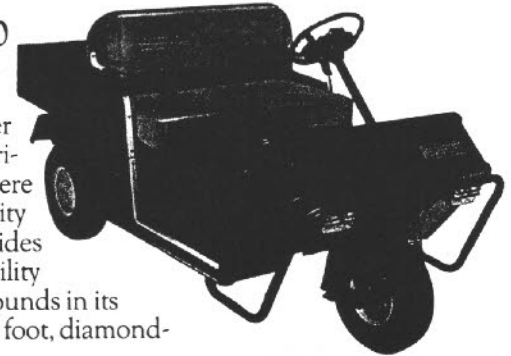
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