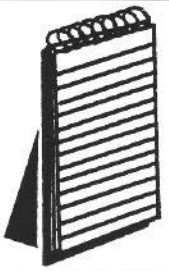

ANOTHER NEW YEAR

By Monroe S. Miller

Could it be that we're going to have a long, snowy winter? Some meteorologists who work in the state believe it is a real possibility, especially for southeastern Wisconsin.

That part of our state had its sixth snowiest November since records have been kept — 104 years. Milwaukee (Mitchell Airport) had a foot for the month, compared to that elusive "normal" year total of 3 inches for November.

The 90 day outlook released around December 1 showed the state on the edge of an area where unusually heavy precipitation is expected.

Our town could use a lot of snow. It would help lower the formidable 1989 precipitation deficit of over 7 inches. The forecasters say if the weather patterns continue, we should exceed the 40.6 inches of snow we've received by the end of a normal winter. Frankly, many of us aren't so greedy that we'd be happy with that normal amount. We've reason to doubt the optimism — we were below average snowfall through November and December.

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Have you been looking for the Wisconsin connections on the educational program at the upcoming 1990 GCSAA Conference and Show in Orlando? There are some — I've counted five. Here are the ones I found:

1. Dr. Lois Berg Stack will give a lecture on Friday, February 23 at 8:30 a.m. entitled "Annual Flower Beds: Designs That Work." Anyone who reads *The Grass Roots* knows Dr. Stack — she's on the faculty at the University of Maine in Orono. A Wisconsin native, Lois received her B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Dept. of Horticulture.

2. Dr. Milt Engelke is instructing one of the two-day seminars on Wednesday and Thursday (February 21 & 22). It's called "Turfgrasses: Qualities, Uses and Sources." Additionally, he is giving a lecture on the 23rd at 10:40 a.m. entitled "Snake Oils or Legitimate Products."

Milt is a native of southwestern Wisconsin (God's Country) and received a B.S. degree from Platteville. He came to the UW-Madison and earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the Department of Agronomy. He is currently an Associate Professor of Turfgrass Breeding and Genetics at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in Dallas.

3. Bob Lohmann, along with Brian Silva, will teach the "Golf Course Restoration, Renovation and Construction Projects" seminar on February 21 & 22. Bob, a golf course architect from suburban Chicago, is a University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Landscape Architecture graduate.

4. If we consider the USGA Green Section Conference, we can add two more Wisconsin connections. Bull's Eye Country Club golf course superintendent Mark Kienert will address this timely topic: "Can We Cope with Mother Nature and Government Regulation?"

5. The USGA Green Section meeting will also feature our own Jim Latham. He's going to help other Green Section staff agronomists in offering "Turf Tips" for 1990. The Green Section Conference meets on Monday, February 26.

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The advance of science has found yet another use for trees — they are helpful in measuring air pollution. Scientists from the University of Stockholm have found that some compounds (e.g., PCBs) can be measured in the waxy sheaths around pine needles. That discovery makes it easy to compare needles from different regions and determine how widespread pollution is.

Some insecticides can also be measured, too. The application of that to golf courses could be useful in determining whether or not applications to turf are staying there.

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Ever wondered whether or not other countries have to deal with as many opponents to issues in the environmental arena as we do? It's a thought that has occurred to me, and that is why I found this report from Australia so interesting.

An Australian court of law heard a case where local opponents to spraying of 2,4-D had brought suit to stop use of the product to control noxious weeds along Byrrill Creek in New South Wales. The court upheld the safety of 2,4-D. While the legal issues were narrowly defined, the case was apparently used by some in an attempt to revive old public controversies and as a forum for generating an informal public referendum on Australian pesticide use in general. Starting to sound familiar?

According to the decision of the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales, "the weight of prevailing scientific opinion worldwide and in Australia is in favor of the continuing use of 2,4-D as a pesticide subject to continuing scientific review and scru-

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tiny." The decision, which was handed down on October 20 and described by the Australian press as "a major precedent", also noted "the insignificant potential risk from exposure to 2,4-D by occupational workers, bystanders or the environment."

At issue in the trial was whether use of 2,4-D for noxious weed control at Byrrill Creek, located southwest of a town called Murwillumbah, required an environmental assessment under Australian law. The judge dismissed the suit on the grounds that the law required no such assessment and ruled that the Far North Coast County Council authorizing the spraying was simply fulfilling statutory requirements to eliminate noxious weeds. Given the controversy that had attended the proceedings, however, the judge also chose to comment on other issues brought before the court.

Specifically citing a 1984 World Health Organization review, the judge rejected claims made during the proceedings that 2,4-D posed a significant risk to health and the environment. "Rather," he concluded, "I accept the prevailing review of the relevant regulatory authorities (worldwide and in Australia) that from the data available at the present it can be concluded that there is no health risk for the general population from the recommended use of 2,4-D. When appropriate safety measures are taken, there is also no health risk for workers."

The judge further noted that "2,4-D is a proven successful herbicide which has been used successfully all around Australia, and overseas, for many years. It is a cheap and readily available herbicide and is very selective in its operation, i.e., it will not kill other nearby plants.

Many studies have been done over many years and it has been cleared of any relevantly adverse effects by the World Health Organization (1984 and 1987), the Evatt Royal Commission on the Use and Effects of Chemical Agents and Australian Personnel in Vietnam (July 1985), the Canadian Center for Toxicology, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It is under review at high scientific levels. At this time scientific doubts have been resolved in favor of its continued use subject to controls and subject to ongoing reviews."

In answer to claims that 2,4-D causes cancer, the judge cited the response of an advisor in toxicology in the Commonwealth Department of Health, that "there is a considerable body of information on 2,4-D which has been reviewed at the national and international level. The overwhelming conclusion is that when used in accordance with recommended practices the phenoxy herbicides present no undue health effects and did not give rise to these effects in man."

A legal decision is, of course, not a finding of scientific fact, and the opponents of spraying in Australia have called for a government inquiry and say they may appeal. But the decision is heartening in that once again the weight of the evidence has been considered on this product, this time in a highly publicized proceeding, and the mass of scientific work conducted thus far has been recognized for what it is — good cause to believe in the safety of 2,4-D.

Somebody should send a copy of the decision to one T. Dawson of the Wisconsin Public Intervenor's Office. On second thought, I'll bet Russ Weisensel already has.

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The following couple of paragraphs should have the title CAUTION: FOOD MAY BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH. That is especially scary to read right after the holiday when most of us have done plenty of (over)eating. According to the American Council on Health and Science, that Thanksgiving and Christmas turkey you enjoyed contains mutagens that can cause mutations in the genetic material in your cells. Bread stuffing contains carcenogens like benzopyrene, ethyl carbamate and safrole. Coffee contains benzopyrene, too, along with chlorogenic acid, caffeine, hydrogen peroxide, methylglyoxal and tannins. Those compounds all cause cancer.

Lima beans contain cyanide. How much more poisonous can you get?

The ACHS releases these facts not to scare you, but to illustrate that "It's the dose that makes the poison." That fact is conveniently forgotten by most environmental zealots.

You would have to eat nearly 4 million tons of turkey to ingest a toxic amount of those mutagens. Likewise, you'd need 100 cups of coffee at one time to suffer from the contents. The same is true for fruits, vegetables, meat and other foods.

The council is also trying to get people to put man-made chemicals into a clearer perspective, since many of them are naturally occurring as well.

There are several University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty members on the American Council on Health and Science: Robert Cassens, Judith Marlett and Michael Pariza.

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