



## USGA Environmental Study May Force Changes. Superintendents Can Handle It. *But What About Golfers?*

By Rob Schultz

When the United States Golf Association announces the results of its \$5.4 million research study in a few years, it doesn't expect golf course superintendents to howl at any changes that may have to be made. But getting golfers to react as positively as the superintendents may be a different story.

The USGA has directed \$3 million of that \$5.4 million research study toward an evaluation of how fertilizers and pesticides affect the environment. One possible result of that research may force superintendents to create more natural landscapes — or areas of brown, an ugly color to golfers who demand that their courses stay green.

"Part of the whole effort will be to get golfers to consider that you don't have to have everything perfect every day of every year," said Jim Snow, the national director of the USGA Green Section and chairman of the Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee. "There may be a few brown spots and some things let go to add natural landscape. It might be just as nice or as acceptable as what we've got now."

Snow admitted that convincing golfers that change is good may be one of the more difficult aspects once the study is finished. And he agreed that superintendents should be left alone to do the convincing.

"Some superintendents already agree that some of things they have to do are ridiculous. But that's what people want and pay for and if the superintendent disagrees, they're fired," Snow said. "So it's going to take an effort on the part of the USGA and many others to convince them."

"As we find out more, and if there are problems that need to be fixed, then

the more critical it will be for us to sell the alternative to the golfers."

At the moment, the study is in its infant stage. The USGA's initial announcement didn't occur until last June at the U.S. Open at Medinah Country Club. C. Grant Spaeth, the USGA's president, said the work will be done by land grant universities throughout the country. And besides examining the fertilizer and pesticide questions, Spaeth said the study will also be geared toward the development of alternative and non-chemical methods of pest control and the influence of golf courses on people and wildlife.

Snow said the USGA received 83 proposals from universities. (The University of Wisconsin did not make a proposal.) That number has since been whittled to 22. Final decisions concerning which schools will take part in the study will be made in December. Work will then begin shortly thereafter. But don't expect immediate results.

"We'll try to update information yearly," said Snow. "But it will take two to three years to finalize the work and publish the information. If we find there are definite problems, then we'll have another set of research programs to investigate the alternatives."

Snow said the completion of the study won't put to an end, once and for all, where golf courses stand in terms of the environment.

"It won't put it to rest, I can pretty much guarantee that, because no matter what is found there will be people who won't believe it," he said. "And there probably will be cases, even though we'll have all this work done at several universities located at all the

climatic regions of the country, where certain materials will always be a potential threat. You'll always hear that 'This site is different than the one that was tested.'"

The USGA fully expects some environmentalists to complain that this was a study funded by a golf association. Thus, it will be one-sided toward golf. To combat such accusations, Snow said the study will include a representative from the Environmental Protection Association, the Audubon Society and other environmental groups.

"In the end, I think the study will give us a lot more information than we have now and it will put an end to some of the concerns, but probably not all of them," Snow said.

Snow wasn't sure what kind of problems the study might find.

"What we know already is that in many situations, fertilizers and pesticides won't be a pollution problem due to the nature of the soils and the particulars of the situation," Snow said. "But in some sensitive areas or where there's a potential for runoff in some unusual conditions, you might find some runoff or leaching through sandy soil and into groundwater supplies."

Nevertheless, Snow didn't want to jump to any conclusions. That rubs against the grain of what this study is all about.

"We're going into this research program with an open mind," said Snow. "Whatever we find, we find. And we'll react to whatever we find."

The superintendents, meanwhile, can rest assured that the USGA will back them any way it can to help implement any of those changes that may have to be made.

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