

The ITM Program

By **Kevin L. Hensler**, Integrated Turfgrass Management Specialist, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility



The Integrated Turfgrass Management program is not so much an environmental program as much as it is a turfgrass management program that provides benefits for the environment. To emphasize this point, the ITM Program has developed a certification program consisting of criteria that a majority of golf course facilities and superintendents are already practicing in their daily activities. The idea is to quantify turfgrass facilities and the beneficial management practices they perform. Attributes of turfgrass sites constitute a beneficial component of environmental protection, merely by their existence.

What has led up to a need for developing Certification Criteria?

The ITM Program itself was borne of a federal and state desire to protect waters-of-the-state from non-point pollution runoff. The United States Environmental Protection Agency mandated that Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources develop and implement broad-based performance standards to protect and enhance the water quality within our state.

Additionally, there is legislation being proposed and enacted across the nation related to turfgrass facilities and environmental concerns. This is not a new phenomenon; the environmental movement goes back to the 1960's and concerns of the health dangers of pesticides and their indiscriminant use. Society was realizing that, just like everything in life, along with the benefits of pesticides, there were also harmful effects. We are a part of this movement to moderate the use of detrimental chemical applications whose harmful impacts outweigh the benefits. This is a move-

ment to preserve the quality of our lives and our communities.

But the pendulum is now swinging to the other extreme. To some groups, any fertilizer or pesticide application is harmful. Most of us would agree that is not the case. By moderating both extremes, these communities can both protect the environment and utilize beneficial turf management practices that include fertilizers and pesticides.

The scary part of this recent spate of fertilizer and pesticide prohibitions is that these communities are considered progressive communities. As such, they are also leaders that other communities follow. Their ideas and legislative procedures are modeled across the country.

As an industry, we need to let the public understand that we can

provide them with the quality of turf they want, and we can do it in a safe manner.

Objective of the ITM Certification Program

The objective of the Certification Criteria is a pro-active response to legitimate community concerns related to turfgrass management practices. **Legitimate** is bolded because it is, or should be, a concern to each of us. We all strive to be environmental stewards whenever possible. A majority of golf industry employees are outdoorsmen. They hunt, fish, boat, and generally recreate in an outdoor setting.

By participating in the ITM Certification program, the industry can counter environmentalists' unfounded radicalism toward our industry. We cannot change or convert the hard-core radicals' beliefs

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about turfgrass maintenance practices, but we can, and should counter their objections. By doing so, we **can** convert the every-day Joe whose family recreates at the local sports field or gathers at the park on Sundays. We just need to provide an alternative viewpoint.

Pro-active participation in the Certification program, and reduced pressures from an educated public can also minimize future legislative efforts directed at the turf industry. In many cases, environmental legislation has a grass roots origin. By quantifying the turf practices utilized, we can present what we actually do, rather than what radicals say we do, to legislative lawmakers who make and write the laws.

The Certification program is a set of criteria designed to help establish and maintain quality turfgrass areas in an environmentally conscience manner, reminding us of the consequences of our actions. The criteria are basic concepts that most turfgrass managers are already utilizing. The idea is to quantify the actions the industry is taking, and take it to the citizens/communities we live in.

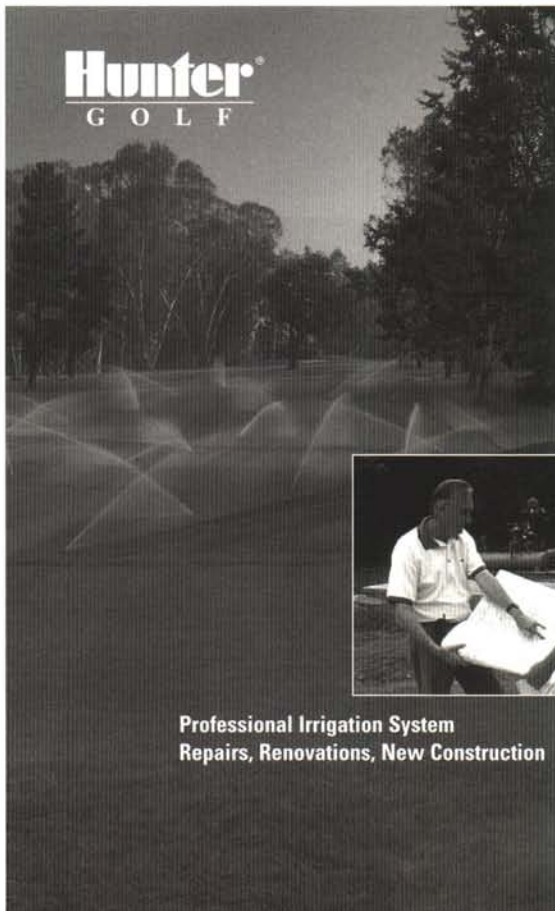
It is a pro-active response to concerns about our industry, and is an action we need to take. It will allow the industry to come together, forming a potential political bloc of educated and informed professionals. I recently listened to a leader in the golf industry say he'd worry about legal restrictions

on the industry when they happen.

I say that is too late. This legal encroachment on turfgrass practices has already happened. NR-151 legislation that passed into law is a foot in the door and we should all be concerned, NOW!

We all talk and complain about people who criticize the turf industry. Well its time to do more than talk. Now is the time to illustrate your commitment to environmental concerns by being a part of the ITM Certification program. We need to let the public know what we are doing and this program is the way to do that.

For more information on the ITM Program, contact Kevin at hensler@entomology.wisc.edu, or (608) 845-2545. ♣



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