

Information, Please

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Factual Approach to Environmental Issues

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American golf courses are better than ever and I can prove it. If not, why does our office get more inquiries about sand bunkers and bunker sands than anything other than new construction? It seems paradoxical that course conditions can remain high when maintenance programs continue to be hampered by pressure to reduce the use of pesticides, fertilizers and water. Evidently, golf course superintendents have responded to the pressures by working smarter than ever with the high quality products which *are* available.

The pressures are not going to let up, though. Pesticide posting laws are in force in some states now, and some versions will follow in others. There are other potential legalities regarding pesticides which could hamper our means of communication with golfers. A recent GAO publication evaluating EPA performance listed the things that lawn service operators *CANNOT* say about the products they apply to lawns:

- Any statement implying that a pesticide is recommended or endorsed by any federal agency.
- A true statement used in such a way that is false or may mislead a customer.
- Claims about the safety of a pesticide or its ingredients such as "safe," "nonpoisonous," "harmless" or "nontoxic" to humans or pets, *with* or *without* phrase "when used as directed."
- Non-numerical or comparative statements on product safety, such as "contains all natural ingredients," "among the least toxic chemicals known" and "pollution approved."
- "Approved by" any federal agency
- "Low in Toxicity," "will not harm beneficial insects," "no health hazard" or "ecologically compatible."

Just remember that EPA considers no pesticide safe since all of them are supposed to kill or adversely affect the growth of something.

To follow these guidelines, how would you answer Mr. and Mrs. Golfer when they ask if the stuff being sprayed by the Man From Mars is safe? What will they do when you hand them labels or MSDS and stand mute? Will this satisfy their Right to Know?

We have some information on this through the publications by Watschke, Petrovic and Cohen, but we still do not have the whole story. For example, we don't know what becomes of pesticides after they are applied to turf and run their course of action. What are the products of their decomposition in soils? In sands? Under aerobic or anaerobic conditions and at what pH? Several years ago, when Milwaukee began applying a digested sludge to farmland, a consulting engineer subjected some of the treated soil to delicate testing for nonmetallic compounds. He found none of the toxic organics he anticipated, but did see the presence of some "unidentified compounds" which *Might Be Harmful*. The bottom line was a recommendation that application be suspended until further tests were conducted to identify the material and determine its toxicity. Of course, *he* would do the testing (at a tidy fee) for a few years.

Charlatans abound whenever an emotional issue arises which deals with unknown, potentially hazardous materials. These folks are usually better speakers and writers than knowledgeable scientists and do not have to prove anything. When faced with data from University research, they simply say that it is tainted by the influence of the anti-environmental agricultural combine. Period.

To cope with this kind of reaction and to provide factual information for those truly interested in environmental issues, the USGA Executive Committee has charged the Research Committee, now headed by Dr. Mike Kenna, with another national-level research program. The 3-year project will develop information to help us:

- Understand the effect of turfgrass pest management and fertilization on water quality and the environment.
- Evaluate alternative pest control measures in Integrated Turf Management Systems and
- Determine the human, biological and environmental factors that golf courses influence.

The proposed budget for 1991 is almost a million dollars, with similar amounts planned for 1992 and 1993.

The intriguing thing about this project is that it seeks the unvarnished truth. If our present practices are faulty, golf will have to clean up its act and, if not, we will have full confi-

(Continued on Page 13)

Information, Please—

(Continued from Page 10)

dence in any statement we make to Mr. and Mrs. Golfer or anyone else.

In addition to information gathering, a manual will be developed by USGA and GCSAA staffs to provide consistent information on integrated turfgrass management practices that ensure environmental quality, to be updated as field-tested research results become available. The program is not meant to cast doubt on recent research efforts, but rather to expand the scope of research and involve all areas of the country.

Meantime, how are we to cope with accumulated grass clippings, tree trimmings and the like? Will manure spreaders (for clipping dispersal in roughs) become standard equipment on golf courses?

Now that mudholes and swamps have been upgraded to protected wetlands, what shall we call the mosquitos?

We will need more and more information to stay current with questions already asked and those which are to come. It comes from research programs on state, regional *and* national levels which must be supported by *all* individuals in golf as well as organizations.

Local-level research is necessary to help us cope with problems unique to specific areas as well as those which can be useful to a general audience. These programs need and deserve the support of golf and golf course superintendents' associations within their sphere of influence. National level funding is more difficult, since we expect some sugar daddy to kick in enough for all of us. Perhaps this is the time for everyone to become involved on a more personal basis.

The USGA Associates Program is a way to support this research as well as other programs benefiting golf. Membership is affordable to anyone, beginning at only \$25. The Associates are for everyone in golf, superintendents, agronomists, sales people and researchers as well as golfers. After all, our livelihood depends on the viability of golf as an industry. The alternative is akin to those "good ole days" of weed pickers in bib overalls or something equally depressing.

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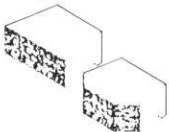
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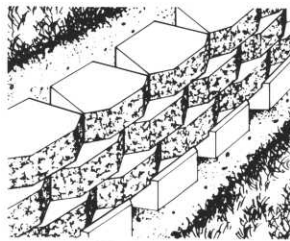
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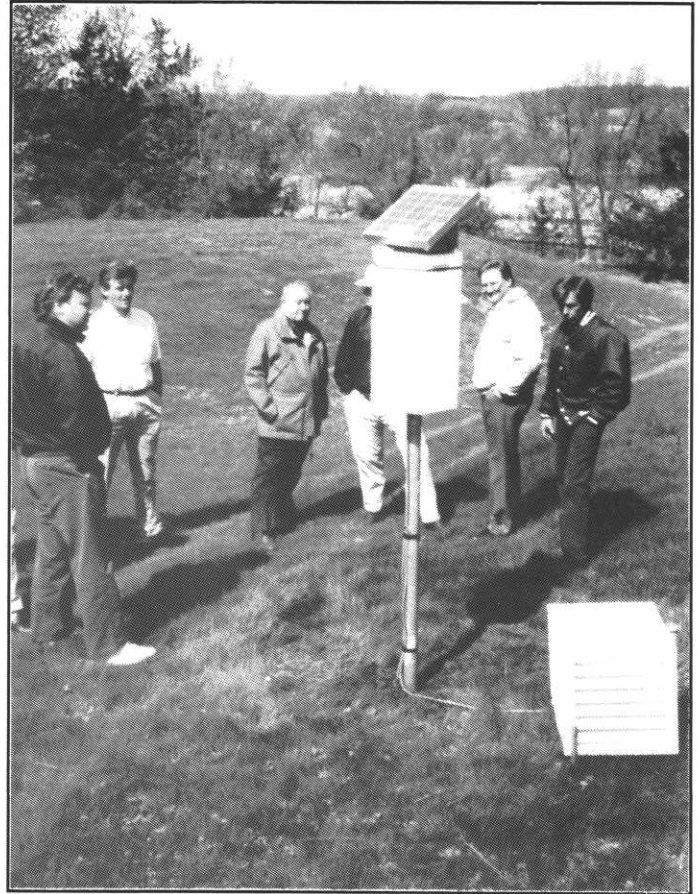
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