

# GCSAA Responds to Wall Street Journal Article on Environmental Criticism

(Ed. Note: Following is a copy of the GCSAA's response to an article that appeared in the May 2, 1994 edition of The Wall Street Journal. We hope that the response helps you and your local colleagues answer questions from your members and media about the story.

We also encourage you to respond appropriately to this or any other articles that tends to misinform the public about our practices. Please keep in mind that we are professionals and that it's important that these responses be well-documented, reasonable and calm.)

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May 5, 1994

Mr. Ned Crabb

Letters to the Editor — Wall Street Journal  
200 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10281

Dear Mr. Crabb:

Your publication has always led the way in debunking eco-myths (e.g., the Alar scare), so I was surprised at Timothy Noah's article on the environmental criticism that has been leveled at golf courses of late.

Instead of highlighting the remarkable efforts being made to ensure that golf courses are environmental assets for communities, the article failed to identify the underlying motivation behind the criticism, revived a questionable New York "study" and suggested that those in my profession were irresponsible using pesticides merely to make courses green and pretty. That's unfair and here's why:

**1. The great majority of the criticism directed at golf courses has been generated by local interest groups who wish to stop a particular development.** We agree that communities should have the right to control their own destinies, but it often seems to be at the expense of our industry's reputation. In short, golf courses everywhere have been victimized by feverish anti-growth rhetoric in a few communities.

**2. Golf course superintendents are widely recognized by the regulatory community as being among the best-educated, most judicious users of pesticides.** These professionals are leading the way in the use of integrated pest management practices, high tech application systems and new generation chemicals and biological controls. As the United States Golf Association's forthcoming research report and numerous previous independent studies show, the products we use on our existing golf courses do not tend to migrate into ground or surface water—despite some dire and often undocumented claims to the contrary.

**3. The report on golf course pesticide usage on Long Island issued by former New York attorney general Robert Abrams contained a great deal of alarmist language with little or no scientific documentation.** It can not be considered to be a valid representation of real-life

golf course management practices.

**4. The quote suggesting that golf courses are "nuked" with chemicals "to get the grass looking real nice" goes to the heart of the biggest fallacy about golf course management practices—that these products are used for purely aesthetic reasons.** This is simply not true. The primary reason to prevent pest damage is to ensure the playability of the course and the value of the property and the enjoyment of the game of golf. Golf courses are extremely valuable assets, both as real property and as community greenspace. They employ hundreds of thousands of people, dramatically increase the value (and therefore the tax base) of the adjacent property and provide recreational and physical fitness opportunities for more than 25 million Americans each year. In short, they are far more than just pretty playing fields.

**5. As the author correctly noted, the study our association commissioned to gather information on causes of death among GCSAA members over the past 25 years cannot and should not be used to imply that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between occupational chemical exposure and human health.** We asked the University of Iowa to conduct the study simply to establish a baseline for a long-term, in-depth study of all health and safety questions facing our current members. We are piloting that study this year. As far as the lead investigator's statement that it's a "prudent strategy" to reduce opportunities for pesticide exposure among golf course workers, we agree wholeheartedly. That's just common sense.

**6. Finally, I felt that the illustration that accompanied the article (a cartoon which depicted golfers in "moonsuits" was not reflective of the content.** Return to the Alar scare for a minute. The most unfortunate part of the whole unsavory story was that people stopped a very healthy activity (eating apples) because of an extremely remote health risk. Your illustration flippantly creates a perception that golfers have something to fear. Nothing in our study or any other credible scientific research indicates that golfers are at risk.

**In closing, I urge any golfer who has a question related to this article to contact his or her local golf course superintendent to find out the real story.** Ask your superintendent about wildlife on the course, about the realities of chemical management practices, about the course's environmental philosophies. I think golfers will find the real story much more positive than the one presented recently in these pages. I also urge the *Journal* to revisit this subject in the future and to take a much more comprehensive approach.

Sincerely,

Joseph G. Baidy, CGCS, President, GCSAA