

Not So Fast! Don't Jump To Conclusions about Pesticides!

By the time you read this, most of the shouting should be long over. But some of the doubts may linger. I am talking about the University of Iowa study that was released in February that suggested that golf course superintendents have a higher death rate than the general public because of their exposure to pesticides. The report also suggested that certain kinds of cancers were more common in this group than would be found in the public.

Well, of course, the media picked right up on this and had lots of fun inferring lots of things from the results of this study—things that were, in fact, completely false. We've been down this road before, and we will be again before too much longer. So let's do a quick review of what we know and what it means for our health, safety and well-being.

First, you need to know that this was a statistical study and by its own admission does not try to establish any cause and effect. It is the media who are trying to do that. This report only looked at the reasons why these 618 superintendents died as listed on their death certificates. There was no follow-up about lifestyles, family histories, work practices or the kinds of materials used in their profession. Although it may raise some questions about these issues, this study did not address them. Of course, the anti-pesticide folks tried to link this study with the Kansas/Nebraska and Iowa/Minnesota studies that also inferred a problem with pesticides. But it is critical that you remember that those studies were deemed flawed by the scientific community—not by pro-pesticide advocates, but by impartial scientists who reviewed the data. In fact, a soon-to-be-released report from the Science Advisory Panel and the Science Advisory Board will say that a connection between 2,4-D and cancer is only “weakly suggestive,” a category that many everyday materials could fall into.

Also, you may have seen other articles in newspapers and magazines that have picked up on a report from the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) written by the Department of Health and Human Services. According to these articles, “A white male of the baby-boom generation has twice the risk of developing cancer as his grandfather.”

“Farmers incur chronic exposures to potentially harmful compounds, such as engine exhausts, chemical solvents, pesticides, fuels, animal viruses and sunlight,” note researchers in the JAMA article. “Could increasing exposures to similar materials in the general population account for the fact that some cancers that are elevated in farmers are also increasing in developed countries?”

The response from the American Cancer Society, however, is very telling: “We should focus on the things we know are of major importance—smoking and diet.” Certainly Americans are exposed today to materials in every-

day living that our grandparents never even dreamed of years ago. And so much of it is beyond our control. This gives great importance to doing the little things with our lifestyles that will minimize our risk of developing serious diseases.

And, of course, be sure to do those things on the job that minimize any risk of exposure to the materials we use. Using proper personal protective equipment when mixing, loading and applying pesticides will go a long way to reduce, if not eliminate, any chance of exposure to pesticides. That's just good common sense.

Although the media and other forces will jump at the opportunity to cry wolf about the safety of pesticides, we can just as quickly cry out, “Not so fast!” The whole story of mortality in the U.S. is more than just about pesticide use. Be sure you are examining everything clearly, rationally and with all the available information before you go jumping to any conclusion. And be sure you are helping to get that rational information to your relatives, neighbors, club members and co-workers.

**Save now,
pay later**
**during the ProTurf®
Pre-Season Sale**

All qualifying Pre-Season orders shipped during the August-December period won't be billed until next spring.

Ask your ProTurf Tech Rep for details.



Mike Redmond
612/422-0785
Leif Erickson
507/437-2825 or
800/728-0354