

Turf Warriors

A Response to an article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune

By John Wiley
Turf Supply Company

(Ed. Note: These comments are in response to an article by Ms. Susan Albright that was published in the Minneapolis Star Tribune.)

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Dear Ms. Albright:

I read with interest the article "Turf Warriors Enlist Nature's Weapons" in the September 30 issue of the Star Tribune. Let me congratulate the writer for addressing Integrated Pest Management in golf course care. My industry and my company endorse the use of IPM practices. The same is true with many golf course superintendents, as encouraged by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

However, our definition of IPM is one more universally accepted than that which the article lists, and is similar to that contained in the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act: "IPM is a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health and environmental risks." Thus, the major goal of an IPM program is not to exclude conventional pesticides, but to seek the best method of control, given the alternatives that exist, the nature and severity of the infestation, economy of funds and time, as well as consideration of environment, human health and safety.

There also are inaccurate and misleading statements within the article:

- A woman golfer infers that women golfers suffer a higher percentage of breast cancer than other women's groups. However, the spokesperson for LPGA is correct. There is no basis for that concern. Nor is there any finding that today's turf and garden pesticides cause breast cancer — or any other cancer form.

- A statement is made that links pesticides to estrogen disruption in humans. The medical and health research community has not confirmed such a linkage. A great deal of research is now being done, but the science, medical and health "jury" is still out.

- The statement that more pesticides are applied to golf courses than to U.S. cropland is an "apples and oranges" type comparison. U.S. cropland includes vast acreages of wheat, small grain and pasture lands which may receive little or no treatment. Golf course superintendents manage turf "crop" areas that receive extremely high levels of foot

and cart traffic, abuse and stress — areas where a seemingly minor infestation of plant disease or insect pests can quickly develop into devastation. These professionals are knowledgeable and well-trained in caring for such intensely used areas which have pest control problems markedly different from most American cropland.

- The article notes a study for the GCSAA on cancer deaths among its members. The university research leader on the study has specifically targeted smoking as prime suspect for the bulk of deaths, a practice that has been directly linked to lung and other organ cancers (the bulk of cancer deaths noted in the study).

The bottom line is that pesticides are an extremely useful tool in IPM programs. Depending on the pest problem, they may be the first, secondary — or later — line of defense. As with any such useful chemical, label directions should be followed explicitly. Such EPA-approved instructions are backed by an average 8-10 years of product research and 120 or more tests, many related specifically to health and environment, before marketing of the product is allowed.



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