

Safety on the Golf Course: The Proper Perspective

Despite reports to the contrary, researchers indicate golfers should not be alarmed by the application of plant protectant materials on golf courses.

"Any discussion of health concerns must be based on accurate data," says Jeff Nus, Ph.D., director of research for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). "Any discussion must also include an accurate portrayal of risk."

According to Nus, safety begins with the professional responsible for the application of materials on the golf course, the golf course superintendent. Those in charge of treating golf courses must, by law, be trained and licensed, and their operations are subject to inspection. He notes application of plant protectants in excessive amounts and frequency is not only fiscally irresponsible, but unhealthy for turfgrass as well. Nus explains that golf course superintendents monitor the drying process to allow golfers access to the course.

"Research has shown that once the pesticide dries on the leaf of the turfgrass plant, you really can't just casually brush it off," says Clark Throssell, Ph.D., and co-director of Purdue University's Turfgrass Research and Diagnostic Center. "To get any pesticide at all you have to take a rough cloth and vigorously rub the grass leaf. Obviously, no one out playing golf is going to do that in the course

of a round. As we take another look at these pesticides, overall we're finding that they provide almost no risk for casual exposure to levels that would be of any concern."

Christopher Borgert, Ph.D., a toxicologist who has served as an advisor to the federal government on toxicity testing for pesticides and industrial chemicals, points to previous research that indicates those who apply chemicals for their livelihood do not suffer a greater degree of health problems than the normal population. Common sense suggests that these individuals are more highly exposed than golfers.

"From a personal standpoint, exposure to chemicals on the golf course under normal circumstances is certainly not something I would worry about," Borgert says. "My personal viewpoint is relevant because my family and I live next to a golf course. Any concern for hormonal disruption is unfounded. It is not supported by the available data or sound reasoning."

All agree, however, that the golfer bears some responsibility to make the golf experience as healthy as possible. Golfers should not put tees in their mouths, lick golf balls or put cigars or cigarettes in contact with the ground. Common sense should be the rule in making contact in any outdoor environment, including the golf course.

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