

Managing Local Issues

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

A local issue has arisen which threatens your golf course maintenance facility or the golf course maintenance industry as a whole. The issue is being driven primarily by emotion, not fact, and is gaining media attention. You have been asked to get involved. The following information outlines how to get started managing the issue by getting organized and developing and implementing an action plan.

I. Organize the Locals

When a controversial issue arises in your community or region, identify and make personal contact with all potential allies familiar with or affected by the issue.

Getting Started

Organize a meeting or conference call with all interested parties. This meeting should include people, companies and organizations directly impacted by the issue, as well as those who could be impacted in the future.

Why a face-to-face meeting is better than a conference call:

A meeting provides the best opportunity to learn where everyone stands on the issue;

A meeting facilitates development of an action plan;

A meeting gives moral support to those impacted by the

issue. Other like-minded people find they are not alone in fighting an issue and that action is being taken.

Before the meeting:

Gather local newspaper articles about the issue and related issues to distribute at the meeting;

Gather any newspaper articles or information you can find from other areas of the country where the issue has received attention;

Gather published industry and scientific information to provide facts and background for letters, speeches and other correspondence.

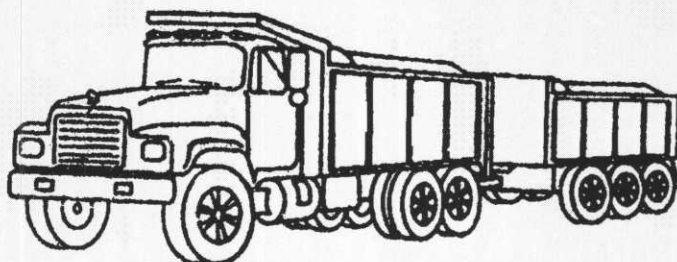
Exchange Names/Addresses

Have everyone at the meeting write their name, business name, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address on a sign-up list. After the meeting, compile the list and distribute it to all attendees to facilitate rapid communication.

II. Develop a Plan

Once all parties have presented their views about the issue, begin work on a plan of action. Following these steps

(Continued on Page 14)



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Managing Local Issues—

(Continued from Page 13)

will help you develop an effective action plan:

Define Your Objective. An objective should briefly explain what the group wants to accomplish from a big picture perspective. An objective should be one or two simple sentences that do not include specific tactics.

Outline Key Audiences. Identify primary and secondary audiences to target for the most impact

Name Allied Organizations (current and potential) and Individuals. List individuals, associations, companies, institutions and government agencies that can provide support, ideas and make other contributions to the group's objective.

Identify Issue Leaders. Identify one or two local individuals who will serve as issue team leaders. These individuals will coordinate activities and organize meetings.

Contact Industry Associations. Make sure all related trade associations are aware of the issue and its development. Include them in relevant correspondence, even if they are not directly involved with the issue. You may want to inform state and national associations (including the GCSAA government relations department) as well.

Locate Experts. Identify local experts who can provide information or support for the group's position on the issue. Experts can include university extension agents, county or state health officials, and other third party sources.

Create Messages. Develop and agree on a few key messages. Use these messages in conversations, correspondence, media interviews and to build support for the group's action.

Set-up a Timeline. After the plan has been developed, establish a timeline for its completion. Set deadlines and assign people to complete the tasks.

Obstacles to Organizing Around an Issue

Sometimes obvious allies may choose not to participate in your group's activities and efforts must be made to overcome their reluctance. Some people will participate but prefer not to lend their names or companies to an issue for fear of negative publicity. This possibility always exists, but the result of doing nothing at all can be far more damaging in the long run.

III. Develop Tactics or Action Items

Now that you have a clear plan of action, it is time to
(Continued on Page 18)

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Managing Local Issues—

(Continued from Page 14)

develop tactics and action items to carry out your plan.

Media Relations

If the issue is expected to have media coverage that impacts the reputation or standing of you or your club, organize a media response plan. A visit to the local newspaper editorial staff (and local TV/radio stations

if appropriate) is a good vehicle to establish a flow of communication. Meet with "editorial writers" if you want an opinion page editorial written about the issue. If you expect future news coverage of the issue meet with the "editorial staff" (i.e. reporters, managing editor, business editor).

Media visits should be organized as soon as an issue breaks. Reporters need contacts, names of experts, and sources that understand the group's position if they are expected to cover the issue fairly.

Never expect reporters to know all the facts. They probably are not familiar with issues affecting the golf course maintenance industry. If reporters do not have adequate background or correct information to cover an is-sue, much damage can occur before they are brought up to speed.

Send a thank-you letter immediately after a media visit. If resulting news coverage is balanced and/or favorable, send another thank-you letter commending the reporter. If the contact is by letter, send a copy to the re-porter's managing editor. If a favorable editorial is written, send a thank-you letter to the editorial board manager.

Organizing an Editorial Board Meeting

If your group wants to influence a newspaper to write an editorial, contact the editorial board manager (one person is typically in charge of arranging visits for the paper) by calling the newspaper's editorial department. Once you've been connected to the right person, briefly state the issue and explain why it is of interest to readers, then request a 15-20 minute meeting to explain the issue to the editorial board (these usually turn into 60-minute sessions).

Who Should Attend an Editorial Board Meeting. Ideally, a small group (3-5 people) with expertise on the is-sue should attend this meeting. Depending on the issue, the group can include management people from golf facilities, industry officials or university extension officials/professors.

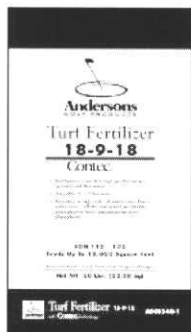
What You Should Bring to an Editorial Meeting. Reporters always prefer leave-behind materials. At the minimum, bring along a list of those in attendance (name, phone, company, and title) as well as additional con-tacts, names of experts, and sources that understand the group's position and are willing to be interviewed (check before suggesting a name). Also provide position papers on the issue, reprints of articles on related subjects and other background information.

Letters to the Editor

Your group can react to newspaper articles by organizing a quick "letter to the editor" writing campaign. Ideally, these letters should come from local concerned citizens and/or business people. For the greatest impact, letters should be submitted quickly after an article runs. Everyone, not just one person representing the group, should write a letter—numbers count! Keep copies of published letters to use in building support. Follow-up with the newspaper by phone if a letter is not printed—ask why it was not printed.

(Continued on Page 32)

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Managing Local Issues—

(Continued from Page 18)

Trade Press Contacts

Consider informing the trade press about the issue. The trade press can be a great ally in communicating to others in the industry, and the information could help superintendents facing similar issues in other parts of the country.

Organize Community Relations

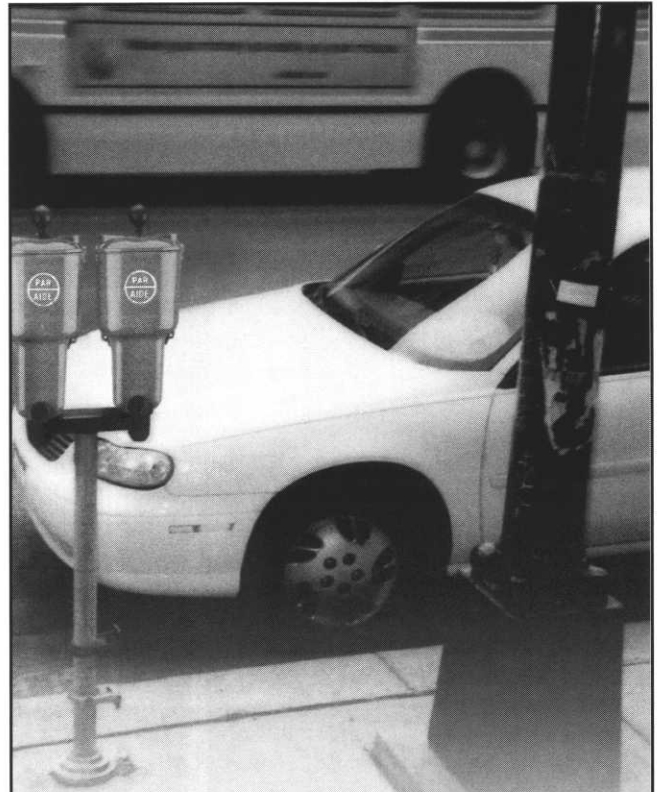
Many civic organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary clubs allow guest speakers to address meetings on specific issues. This is a great way to reach community decision-makers and business people. The GCSAA government relations department can help you prepare for a presentation.

On-going Issue Management

Should the issue be a long-term situation, identify one person to be the "key contact." This person can help coordinate correspondence, watch for issue developments, and serve as the go-to contact for the rest of the group. This person should be local and have a strong interest in the situation. The issue may "drag" over time, making it difficult to maintain high action interest by coalition members. Regular updates and communication to the coalition will keep them alert to the issue.

For help managing local issues, contact the GCSAA government relations department at (800) 472-7878, or e-mail at grmail@gcsaa.org.

(Editor's Note: This document was adapted from the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) guide to "Managing Local Issues." Reprinted with permission from RISE, 1156 Fifteenth Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005.)



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