

MGCSA Nominates E. Paul Eckholm, CGCS, For GCSAA Excellence in Government Relations Award

(Editor's Note: The following is the information sent to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America endorsing E. Paul Eckholm for the 2002 GCSAA Excellence in Government Relations Award.)

Late in the 1999-2000 Minnesota Legislative Session, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture presented a Bill restricting the sale and use of phosphorous fertilizers. It had been determined by Governor Ventura, under the direction of the Commissioner of Minnesota Planning Dean Barkley, that phosphorous in our lakes was contributing to their rapid decline. Furthermore, the MDA resolved on their own that the real issue was the misapplication of fertilizer products, primarily upon homeowner property.

The Minnesota Golf Association's legal team brought this information to the attention of then President of the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association, Paul Eckholm. At the time of the first legislative draft, the application of phosphorous was not going to be allowed in the seven county metropolitan areas. Seeing the ramifications of the denial of using a macronutrient upon our fine turf surfaces and the long-range implications of the potential expansion of the bill to restrict all fertilizer applications upon golf courses through out the state, Mr. Eckholm immediately began work to improve upon the rapidly proceeding legislation. There was no time for a presidential creation of a committee to investigate the issue, thus he went into battle alone.

After much discussion with the MGA's lobbyist Doug Carnival, Mr. Eckholm realized he had to develop a professional rapport with the sponsors of the bill and explain the impact upon the multi-million dollar golf course industry. And furthermore, the limited environmental impact when used properly. Extensive meetings with Jerry Spitzman, Rick Hansen and Greg Baziky of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, followed by testimony in front of the legislator resulted in the table of the issue until the 2000-2001 sessions.

Paul Eckholm appreciated that he had to convince the legislators, swayed by the environmental "anti phosphorous" group, that the golf course industry was a steward for the environment and handled phosphorous in a responsible fashion so as not to impact the balance of the natural ecosystem. During the summer of 2000, the MGCSA President attended a two-day seminar designed to bring all parties together. A challenge at best as the opinions were so vastly divergent.

Three different pieces of legislation were proposed during the 2000-2001 session. After many hours of testimony, of which Mr. Eckholm was present and active in lobby efforts, a general consensus was forming. Through out this process, Mr. Carnival of the MGA and Mr. Eckholm of the MGCSA were quietly working in the background to get an exemption written into the bill as an out for the MGCSA members and their courses.

At the end of the 2000-2001 session, a bill was almost passed, and in fact, the House version was approved. However, at the last minute, the Senate decided to table the material for another year.

Redundantly, Mr. Eckholm continued his lobbying efforts

through the summer of 2001, again in the effort to strengthen the position of the MGCSA.

And even more repetitive, the 2001-2002 session again brought three versions of the Phosphorous to the legislature. Again, copious amounts of testimony were required to establish the importance of phosphorous in the turf management industry and the continued environmental stewardship promoted by superintendents at large. And again, Paul Eckholm stepped up to the plate, testifying in front of the legislature, conducting personal meetings in the halls of the State Capitol and soliciting votes via email and phone conversations.

Just prior to approval by the Senate and House, a streamlined bill went to conference committee for final review and passage. Mr. Eckholm's presence was critical at this juncture. And the final product, approved by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Jessie Ventura is as follows:

S.F. 1555 prohibits the use of phosphorous turf fertilizers in the counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennipen, Ramsey or Washington counties unless:

1) A tissue, soil or other test performed by a laboratory in the last three years indicates that the levels of available phosphorous in the soil is insufficient to support healthy turf growth:

2) It is being used on newly established or developed turf and lawn areas during the first growing season; or

3) The fertilizer is used on a golf course under the supervision of a person licensed or certified, or approved by an organization with an ongoing training program approved by the commissioned.

Without the championship of Paul Eckholm, superintendents across the state of Minnesota would have been impacted either immediately or in the near future. By being a strong and persistent advocate for the industry, Mr. Eckholm prevented the potential for many turf related challenges. Without his interdiction, phosphorous would not be available to many golf course superintendents.

Currently Paul Eckholm is chairing a committee with Dr. Brian Horgan, Turf Extension Specialist at the University of Minnesota, to develop a plan centering upon training and continued education of all golf course fertilizer applicators in the state of Minnesota. It is understood by the committee that not only is it necessary to focus upon phosphorous, but all plant nutrients as well so as to be proactive in a state and perhaps even nation wide fertilizer applicator program.

On behalf of the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Board of Directors, I endorse E. Paul Eckholm as the 2002 recipient of the Excellence in Government Relations Award in the category of Advocacy. No finer example of putting forth an effort to influence laws and regulations affecting golf course management, including but not limited to work with law makers, regulators, alliances, coalitions and other entities can be found beyond E. Paul Eckholm.

Thank you considering this application.

*—Rick Fredericksen, CGCS
President, Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association*