

Is Minnesota Going California?

By BRIAN C. NETTZ, CGCS

The Presidio Golf Course, San Francisco, California

One of the great things about the GCSAA Conference and Show is the opportunity to discuss common issues with people across the world and to learn of the interesting differences among industry regulations in other locales. Personally, I get a kick from hearing my friends at Minnesota courses talk about all the new chemistries that they have applied to their turf, since here in California we can apply probably one eighth of the various chemistries that one can apply to turf in Minnesota.

By way of introduction, I am a 1994 graduate of the University of Minnesota with a degree in turf management. I worked for roughly five years at various clubs in the Minneapolis area as an assistant before I decided to head West to the San Francisco Bay Area. After a brief stint as an assistant at an Oakland area club, I became superintendent at a golf facility in the Monterey Bay area for nearly five years. After five years in Monterey County, a county with a rather "permissive" policy on pesticide use due to the huge Ag industry, I moved into what could be called the most restrictive place on the planet - the Presidio Golf Course in San Francisco. Not only inside of San Francisco, but also inside a National Park in San Francisco.

Now I suppose many of you are thinking that was probably a poor choice on my part. However, it seems that Minnesota is on the fast track to becoming more and more like California in its regulation of pesticides and their use. I have read with trepidation of the fertilizer restrictions now in place, although I don't exactly understand the logic behind it. A guy can still go to Home Depot and dump a half a bag of fertilizer on the lawn and the other half on the sidewalk before a 1-inch rain. Now am I to believe that the golf courses are polluting the ground water? There may have been a time when chemicals and fertilizers were applied with impunity, but it wasn't within my nearly 17 years in the industry. Who can afford to make unnecessary applications?

I believe that what happens in California is 10 years away from what will hit the Midwest but many industry peri-

odicals believe that tougher legislation is headed your way sooner, and California may be the model upon which your new regulations will be based. The fertilizer license and phosphorous concerns are the harbinger of greater things to come. I will explain the processes involved at my facility in the hopes that it will spark concern and proaction on the part of superintendents to educate the lawmakers in your state about our dedication to responsible



use, our challenges, our fiscal responsibility governing pesticide use and our dedication to the environment and its inhabitants.

First thing you need to understand is that once the EPA registers a pesticide for use on turf, it has to be registered for use by Cal EPA. The safety and environmental concerns of Cal EPA are stricter than that of the Federal Government, which is why you I hear you guys talk about chemical applications that you have made, and I haven't even heard of the product. Then you have to be able to apply it in your county as determined by the county Ag Commissioner.

This particular location is extreme. We do not make preventative applications. We stick to a comprehensive 130-page Integrated Pest Management Plan that covers the typical diseases of this climate and the products we can use to treat them, the circumstances that constitute an application window, and define the threshold requirement for chemical application. Basically we stick to Agronomy 101 here-mowing height, fertility levels and water management.

Basically if I see snow mold on the greens, I have to call the woman at the National Park Service who has the PCA. A PCA is a person who has a Pest Control Advisor's License. You cannot, even as a pesticide applicator license holder, apply a pesticide without a pest control recommendation from a PCA holder. All the turf suppliers retain a PCA because you cannot sell pesticides without a PCA license. The requirements for a PCA license are a four-year degree in a horticultural science and passing a tough exam.

In this scenario, the PCA will come out and inspect the greens, determine if there are any alternative measures we can take to mitigate damage and determine if a chemical application is necessary and prudent. In our case, we are socked in by fog for the majority of the summer, and the PCA is very reasonable about giving us the OK as long as she feels comfortable that we are using proper IPM procedures. So you see that there is a requisite level of integrity needed on the part of all parties

involved at a professional level. I could go out and take matters into my own hands, but why? I represent, to the National Park Service and the city residents looking for something to protest, superintendents and the golf industry. I don't want to be on tomorrow's front page news unless I win the lottery.

If a chemical application to the greens is warranted and prudent, then she will write me a pest control recommendation as shown. It is always weather dependent. The pest control recommendation will also contain various other actions necessary pursuant to this particular case. It also has an expiration date.

Now I can begin monitoring weather, checking the tee sheet to figure out how I will spray with the first tee time at five minutes before sunrise everyday. I have to maintain the proper re-entry interval as prescribed by the label, which is until spray has dried. Often the pest control recommendation will state not to apply with rainfall with rainfall forecast within 24 hours to ensure there is no off-site runoff.

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I will monitor this on three different websites and if things look good I will have to post a Notice of Intent to Apply a Pesticide in the pro shop, the clubhouse entrance and the upper and lower gates that create a public walk path. This must be done 24 hours in advance of application.

All this being done, we spray just as everyone has done since spraying began—our fingers crossed that the sprayer doesn't break halfway through. We do everything by the book and rinse the machine at our wash rack and spray rinse in the rough same as you guys.

The real challenge at this facility is scheduling tee times and spraying to maintain proper re-entry interval enforcement. Regular foliar fertilizer applications are not a problem for us. Although play will begin teeing off 5 minutes before sunrise, we can manage to stay ahead of play. If we have to make a fungicide application to the greens, or spray an herbicide (Turflon ester is our only option aside

from Roundup) we will plan it ahead of time as well as possible and block off tee times in the Super Twilight Rate hours. Therefore we will usually begin spraying at five-ish. This is usually when the winds pick up. We are on a peninsula and the ocean is very close by so the afternoon winds here can be brisk. We use covered booms and can make our applications as long as the wind speed is below 15 mph. The pro shop will maintain extra help on spray days to ensure that no one enters the treated area before the re-entry interval expires.

So, as you can see, there are definitely more hoops to jump through. Is it impossible? No. Is it unreasonable? No. The required work of the superintendent is not much more than the current industry standard of dedication to responsible pesticide use by the average superintendent. The difference is merely that the policies are mandated. The difference could be described merely as one of perception. Superintendents on the whole are an independent bunch. We have to be to survive. What impresses me is that we are, as a profession, people of integrity, commitment and lovers of the outdoors. After all,

if the course down the street called to borrow an aerifier you would eagerly loan it and an operator. Would a restaurant or hotel do the same? I don't think so. Perhaps we are not letting the people who make the laws know how committed we are to our courses, our profession, our players and our course's wildlife.

Prepare for more documentation, more regulation and smaller chemical arsenals. Do not, however, sit back and wait for it become law. Go out and tell the people who believe we are a detriment to the environment what we are about. Be active in the process, but respectful of other parties' views. The new mandates in your state seem familiar to me. The Emergency Response Plan that you are all working on is nearly identical to the ones we have to have here for our hazardous waste generator permits (used oil recycling).

Prepare yourselves to become even more of an administrator and communicator. After all, you are fortunate to have a beautiful environment around you. Become a voice in favor of its protection, not the opponent.



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