

Independence Day

by Mark Merrick, MAAGCS

I was thinking today about the freedom we have in our country. But just how much freedom really exists and can the answer be related to the golf course industry?

Some of you know about my existential philosophy of life and might say, "Why are you writing about freedom?" Well, I just wanted to stimulate your thinking and I also had a couple of hours to kill.

I hope you are as tired as I am of the armchair environmentalists out there controlling our freedom as golf course superintendents. Do you ever wonder if they really know what they are talking about? Do you ever wonder if our politicians are hitching their carts

to this wagon for political gain? Just think about the recent pesticides that were taken out of our educated and trained hands. Then walk down to your local hardware store and take a look on the shelves. There you will see that some of those very same pesticides, taken out of our professional hands, have been put right into the hands of armchair environmentalists who can apply and control them better. I call that freedom. Don't you?

Hey, just for fun, let me throw out some *facts* that might make armchair environmentalists sit up a little higher in their chairs. Did you know they may be doing the exact opposite of

their intended purpose? Let me give you a few good examples.

Some armchair environmentalists have targeted disposable juice boxes because they contribute to waste. But transporting empty glass bottles requires more trucks than transporting empty boxes, using more fuel and causing more air pollution. And aseptic packages don't need refrigeration, saving energy.

Disposable diapers are also denounced as wasteful. But over its "lifetime," a cloth diaper uses six times more water than a disposable does.

How about the "plastic-is-bad" attitude? Did you know that plastic requires less energy to

continued on next page

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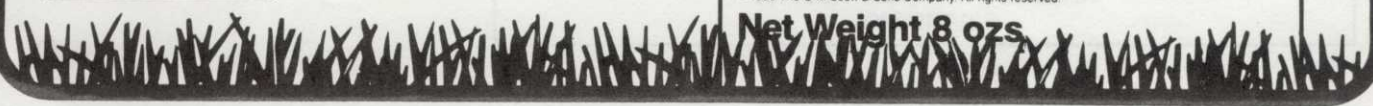
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Independence, from page 3

produce than aluminum and glass? Plastics are also lighter and more efficient than many other kinds of packaging and they comprise only about eight percent of municipal solid waste by weight. A research organization in Germany examined the effects of eliminating all plastic packaging in that country. It found that energy consumption would almost double and the weight of solid wastes would increase 404 percent.

Would universal recycling

necessarily be better for the environment? The answer is no!

Recycling has environmental side effects. Curbside garbage-recycling programs often require more collection trucks which means more fuel consumption and more air pollution. Some recycling programs use large amounts of energy and produce high volumes of waste water.

Take paper recycling. Proponents argue that every ton of recycled newsprint saves 17 trees. But most of the trees used to make paper are planted explicitly for manufacturing paper. Less paper

from virgin pulp means fewer trees planted by commercial harvesters. According to a study by Resources For The Future, a nonpartisan research organization in Washington, DC, the net effect of universal paper recycling could actually be a decline in tree coverage, as lands are converted to other uses.

Consumers have been told: anything that decomposes naturally is good, and anything that doesn't is bad. But most modern landfills are capped, inhibiting biodegradation of anything.

Biodegradable products, if disposed of improperly, can leach dangerous chemicals into the water supply. Nonbiodegradable products, for the most part, do not have this problem.

Armchair environmentalists are always talking about how much trash the average American family throws away. Compared with the United States, the average Mexican household throws away three times more food debris—1.6 pounds per household per day—according to a University of Arizona study. No doubt Americans throw away a lot of stuff, but the amount of waste discarded into landfills has remained fairly constant for decades.

As William Rathje, a leading expert on garbage, has observed: "Americans are wasteful, but we have been conditioned to think of ourselves as more wasteful than we truly are," I don't know about you, but I don't want to be conditioned by anything but my air-conditioner.

Most armchair environmentalists reading this are probably saying, "Where did you get that info?" I direct you to *A Consumers Guide to Environmental Myths and Realities* by Lynn Scarlett.

I hope you had a happy and free Independence Day.

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