

## Pesticide defense feedback indicates shift in strategy

The reaction to our April Outlook, 'Safer Than Table Salt' Doesn't Work Any-more, has been rewarding. Manufacturers, distributors, and applicator groups have been supportive. They all share a very serious concern for pesticide liability if something isn't done to restore a trust in appropriate uses of pesticides. Each has promised investment in training and public relations.

But, more than anything else, the reaction shows our strategy for dealing with pesticide issues is changing.

It's hard to think offensively when we are regularly pounded by the general press as being sloppy, careless, and untrained. As Russel Weisensel, executive secretary of the Forestry/Rights-of-Way/Turf Coalition, puts it, "When anti-pesticide organizations hint that pesticide residues in our foods are slowly poisoning us and causing birth defects, and write articles stating herbicide exposure caused the amputation of a worker's leg, then references to table salt, shampoo, and other household products are needed to gain attention of our various audiences so that realistic assessments of benefits and risks are considered."

My point was, I'm not sure these comparisons do gain 'positive attention'. Instead, they give the average citizen the negative impression that he is more exposed than he thought to chemical threats upon his health.

Ray Russell, business manager for Dow Chemical's herbicide group, has spent millions of dollars and many weeks on the road defending herbicides. He admits his attitude has changed regarding pesticide defense.

"Pesticide issues are political, not scientific," Russell insists. "We can't fight political battles with lawyers and scientists. We must develop broad-based coalitions to show politicians there are people who believe in the need for pesticides and they are willing to publicly support them."

Russell adds two more reasons for adapting our defense of pesticides. The first is the anti-pesticide battle is less national and more local.

The second is the attack is against pesticides in general, not specific products. This makes a reasonable defense more difficult since the data on specific pesticides is much easier to present than a defense of all pesticides. After all, there have been mistakes and we can't hide from them.

The Environmental Protection Agency has made matters worse by deemphasizing the separation of restricted use from general use pesticides. Citing budget constraints, EPA has played into the hands of those wanting all substances more complex than baking soda banned from the market.

Weeds Trees & Turf in coming issues will feature organizations, not just talking, but acting.



*Bruce F. Shank*

by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

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