

The pesticide issue

Recent assaults by the nation's media—especially the big three television networks—on pesticide use have brought the professional landscape manager some unwanted problems.

"This happened to me," relates one golf course superintendent, "the day after the story on '20/20' about the Navy lieutenant who allegedly died from exposure to pesticides used on a golf course.



"I got a call from a lawyer whose client had visited us the day before and was now breaking out in a rash. He demanded to know exactly what his client had seen being spread on the course. I think the lawyer had visions of a major killing in the courts.

"Of course, we keep pretty detailed daily records of what's being put down. So I went to my assistant and asked him what that man saw being applied. And do you know what it was? Not insecticide, not herbicide or fungicide. Not even fertilizer. The only thing our crews put on the course the previous day had been sand topdressing! Can you believe that?

"Needless to say, the lawyer didn't bother me again."

The "20/20" story, plus one on the "CBS Evening News with Dan Rather" brought a torrent of response from the green industry.

Jim Brooks, executive director of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, wrote CBS news director Gordon Sauter. Essentially, he said that the network had no cause to air the story, and that the PLCAA takes the utmost pride in its service.

Brooks received this response from an unbending CBS vice-president Emerson Stone, who answered every point of Brooks' criticism: "Because we do take care in research, I am glad to have your specifics in case we examine this subject again. Thank you for your interest in CBS News. I hope that we do better by you in the future."

This 1986 version of what might be called anti-pesticidism—shoot and ask questions later—can only be met with long-term and very disciplined consumer education. And it is up to the individual lawn care company, landscape contractor and golf course superintendent. That means you.

Jerry Roche

Jerry Roche, editor

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Questions and comments are encouraged.

Write or call editor Jerry Roche:
7500 Old Oak Blvd.,
Cleveland, OH 44130.
Phone: 216-243-8100.