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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

LEGISLATION

Lawn and golf pesticides get kicked in the backside

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Green industry interests were joking that Lt. George Prior has become “the man who wouldn’t die.” But it was no joke as the U.S. Senate held a subcommittee hearing on the alleged dangers of turf pesticides here March 28.

The most forceful and bitter witness to appear during the all-day session was Thomas Prior of Maplewood, N.J., who graphically recounted the death of his brother George eight years ago—several weeks after playing golf at a local course. Prior unhesitatingly blamed the death on exposure to a fungicide which had been applied to the golf course.

“There is a clear need for the government to take a more active role (in pesticide control),” Prior said. “It was established beyond doubt that chlorothanil (Daconil) killed my brother.”

Prior also said that testing laboratories paid for by pesticide manufacturers “have been abused” and that “there are no industry-wide standards for training or application.”

Also taking the stand were 11-year-old Kevin Ryan of Arlington Heights, Ill. and Sharon Malhotra of Murrysville, Pa.

Ryan said, “I can’t function mentally when I’m ex-



Room 216 of the Hart Building in Washington, D.C. was site of a Senate subcommittee hearing on lawn pesticides. Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) (center, facing camera) presided.

posed to pesticides. I can’t even play in my own yard because my neighbors spray their lawns. And being on a baseball team is a dream I’ve given up on because all the ballfields are treated.

“They (lawn care companies) are robbing me of my childhood, and I am angry with my country for allowing these untested chemicals to be applied by untrained applicators.”

Said Malhotra, who complained of severe headaches, numbness, nausea and muscle twitches because of pesticides: “Everytime I leave my home, I’m risking exposure to pesticides. Hundreds of thousands of Americans’

lives have been seriously compromised.” Then—with passion: “Give us a chance to live normal, productive lives again.”

Senators in attendance were John Warner (R-Va.), Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). They did not ask for testimony in favor of turf pesticides until later in the day, when most media representatives had left to file their stories.

Representing the golf course industry was William R. Roberts, government relations chairman of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

“The goal of the GCSAA is to work with legislators and regulators to protect

the environment,” Roberts said. “We do not intend to deal in the emotions of the moment. We will spend our dollars on research and education. We will not spend our dollars in the courtroom challenging the regulatory process.”

“Golf is honestly trying to...leave our home base here on earth...a little bit better.”

The hearing was called as a response to a General Accounting Office (GAO) report. Testifying for the GAO was associate director Peter F. Guerrero, who chose to focus on alleged cases of false advertising by the lawn care industry.

“We believe that the

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public should be protected from pesticide advertisements that convey the impression of safety," Guerrero said, noting possible cancer risks, birth defects and other potential long-term effects of pesticides. "The industry continues to make advertising claims that its products are safe or non-toxic while federal enforcement actions against such claims remain limited."

The lawn care industry contends that use of such terms as "practically non-toxic" in advertising are accepted in the scientific community and not misleading.

"The disputed facts are before the court but, as of this date, have not been adjudicated," said Dr. Roger Yeary of ChemLawn.

Sen. Reid, chairman of the subcommittee, signalled the hearing's tone with his opening statement: "Remember, lawn chemicals by their very de-



Golf course superintendent Bill Roberts (left) and Dr. F. Eugene Hester (right) of the National Park Service testify.

sign are dangerous," he noted. "Pesticides are designed to kill. And what kills garden pests and weeds can also have an adverse health effect on people."

Sen. Lieberman, whose statement was also made before the media's mass exodus, was even more emphatic.

"In some cases," Lieberman noted, "lawn care chemicals are toxic to humans. In some cases, lawn care chemicals can kill people. That is truth."

"Too many of the makers of lawn care chemicals and the purveyors of lawn care services have been irresponsible in dealing with the risks associ-

ated with the products. And, I'm sorry to say, the government has been derelict in its duty to protect the public interest."

Taking the stand to defend turf pesticides were Roberts, Tom Delaney of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, Dr. James Wilkinson of the Pesticide Public Policy Foundation, Jay Vroom of the National Agricultural Chemicals Association, Yeary, Dr. Warren Stickle of the Chemical Producers and Distributors Association and Dr. Michael Gough of the Task Force II on 2,4-D Research Data.

Lining up on the other side were Guerrero, Ryan, Malhotra, Prior, Attorney General Robert Abrams of New York, Dr. Sheila Zahm of the National Cancer Institute, Anne Bloom of Public Citizen and Jay Feldman of the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides.

—Jerry Roche □

WHAT THEY SAID IN WASHINGTON...

Selected quotations from testimony offered to the Senate Subcommittee on Toxic Substances, Environmental Oversight, Research and Development:

● "These are issues that have been neglected. We'll hear testimony that will get people talking."

—Sen. Harry Reid

● "I'm really concerned that the EPA has let this go on and on. We're dealing with real problems that deal with real people."

—Sen. Reid

● "The industry has stonewalled us in court. Your own estimates indicate that as many as 30 to 40 million people could be chemically sensitive."

—Hon. Robert Abrams

● "We do not intend to take the time of the subcommittee to present a detailed critique of the (Public Citizen) report, except to state that it is unauthoritative, inaccurate and misleading."

—Dr. Roger Yeary

● "The GAO says that we have too little information about most of the widely used lawn chemicals to say they are safe for people. Yet all of them are sold with the words 'EPA Registered' right on the label. And none of them are sold with adequate warnings."

—Sen. Joseph Lieberman

● "GAO found that the lawn pesticides industry continues to make claims (prohibited by FIFRA) that its

products are safe or non-toxic. EPA considers these claims to be false and misleading."

—GAO report

● "Of the 40 pesticides that comprise over 95 percent of the chemicals used by commercial lawn care firms, 12 are suspected carcinogens, 21 have been shown to cause other long-term health effects in lab animals or humans, and 20 have been shown to cause short-range damage to human central nervous systems."

—Anne Bloom

● "We are facing a national pesticide exposure crisis, the dimensions of which are not adequately calculated by the U.S. EPA. At the same time, people are getting sick from non-agricultural pesticide exposure in their homes, offices, schools and workplaces, through direct exposure, drift, volatilization, or by way of residues on treated landscapes."

—Jay Feldman

● "Manufacturers are making significant strides in diagnostics. These improved programs, involving state-of-the-art detection and identification kits, go a long way toward enhancing our targeted use of available technology."

—Jay Vroom

● "EPA should address the public's confusion about pesticide registration by banning pesticides containing known or probable carcinogens to be used for aesthetic purposes like lawn care."

—Mr. Abrams □