

# HOT TOPICS

## Industry says that 2,4-D report is based on shoddy research

**CLEVELAND**—A report in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* associating the herbicide 2,4-D with cancer in dogs is being criticized as inconclusive and poorly researched.

The September report concludes that dogs whose owners use herbicides containing 2,4-D are up to twice as likely to develop malignant lymphoma.

The 2,4-D Task Force, a group that conducts health and safety studies, says that "the weakness of the study's conclusions needs to be considered against the backdrop of numerous other studies which have found no convincing evidence of a link between 2,4-D and cancer."

Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Lawn Care Association (PLCAA), says 2,4-D is a worthwhile product:

"(2,4-D) is the most thoroughly tested

product of its kind on the market today. It has been the subject of toxicological, epidemiological and mutagenicity studies on three continents...which should be reassuring to those who have come to value 2,4-D for its cost and reliability."

Delaney says the questionnaire did not provide dog owners a list of chemicals from which to choose: "They had to rely on the memory of the person interviewed."

Dog owners were questioned 10 to 58 months after the animals were seen at veterinary hospitals. Also, some dogs that died from malignant lymphoma were never allowed access to yards and had



The health of dogs exposed to 2,4-D is the subject of a controversial report from the National Cancer Institute.

owners who never used 2,4-D or a lawn care service.

Howard M. Hayes, the study's principal author, and his co-authors did note that applications of 2,4-D by do-it-yourselfers are "more likely to reflect the actual 2,4-D exposure opportunity...than the number of lawn treatments by commercial lawn care companies."

James W. Gillett, director of Cornell University's Institute for Comparative and Environmental Toxicology, says the authors did not prove that 2,4-D is a carcinogen in dogs, or that lawn applications are related to any cancer in humans.

Dr. Wendell Mullison, one of the original developers of 2,4-D, says the evidence is circumstantial, and that epidemiologists usually do not consider any single study as proof of a cause and effect relationship.

Hayes and his co-authors admit that an absence of precise exposure data is "a major weakness" of the study, and say application frequency is the basis for their conclusions. The study was based on four 2,4-D applications per year. "The most it is applied," says Mullison, "is once in the spring and often again in the fall."

—Terry McIver

### One vet's opinion

■ "I think there are some problems inherent in these types of epidemiological studies," says Dr. Robert Poppenga, DVM, of the American Board of Veterinary Toxicologists at Michigan State University.

Poppenga questions "the (homeowners') ability to recall details" regarding what chemicals were applied and when.

"I'm not certain that an

owner would have information with regard to what chemical the company may be actually applying. I'm not sure where they got that data."

In a 1990 article on pets and lawn chemicals, Poppenga wrote that "it is important to establish whether the amount of chemical the animal may have been exposed to is near a range known to be associated with adverse

health effects in the animal species."

"If used according to label directions and certain precautions are followed, nearly all commonly used lawn chemicals are safe around dogs and cats."

Today, Poppenga says that while the 2,4-D study, "may raise some legitimate concerns, it has to stand the test of time."

According to Poppenga, other studies need to be conducted before any blame is placed.

—T.M.

### ELSEWHERE

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# Tree crew leader wages go up

**AMHERST, N.H.**—Wages for crew leaders increased from an average of \$11.25 per hour to \$12.00 per hour this year at member companies, according to a National Arborist Association survey. That is a 6.67 percent increase over 1990 wages.

Median wages for climbers and ground persons pretty much remained at 1990 rates, however. The new survey indicates the national average for climber hourly pay is \$9.95 and for ground persons is \$7.50.

Wages in the Pacific were highest of any other region reporting, across the board: \$12.50 for crew leaders, \$11.50 for climbers and \$8.00 for ground persons. Likewise, wages in the Southwest were lowest: \$9.50, \$6.75 and \$4.85, respectively.

One hundred twenty-eight NAA member firms responded to the annual survey.

## NAA wage survey

	Crew Leaders	Tree Climbers	Ground Persons
National	\$12.00	\$9.95	\$7.50
Northeast	\$12.50	\$10.75	\$8.00
Southeast	\$9.88	\$9.00	\$6.50
Midwest	\$12.00	\$9.50	\$7.00
Rocky Mtn.	\$9.75	\$8.75	\$6.87
Southwest	\$9.50	\$6.75	\$4.85
Pacific	\$12.50	\$11.50	\$8.00

Source: National Arborist Assn.

## Landfills valuable to the green industry? This letter-writer thinks they are, indeed

**CLEVELAND**—A letter received at LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT regarding September's "As I See It" column from Charles T. Pick, national project manager for DK Recycling, Lake Bluff, Ill.:

*"Composting brings a number of new and valuable products and services to local landscapers, and composting sites themselves can offer considerable savings to area dumpers.*

● *"I find it difficult to believe that (a landscaper mentioned in the editorial) has suffered a 350 percent increase in landscape waste tipping fees. Even in Illinois, where yard waste was banned from landfills in July of 1990, yard waste tipping fees are generally at or below regular solid waste tipping fees. Furthermore, the numerous composting sites that have emerged over the last 18 months offer more convenient locations than previously available, cutting haulers' transportation costs considerably.*

*"It is highly unlikely that landfills or composting sites are currently charging 350 percent more for leaves and grass than they are for regular solid waste. Indeed, we have seen tipping fees increase by several hundred percent, but over the course of several decades.*

● *"Small companies do not need 10*

### 'Small companies can save money by composting in-house.'

*acres to compost. My company handles the yard waste from over 100 maintenance companies and three municipalities on only seven acres. Roughly 4,000 cubic yards of waste per year could be easily composted on half an acre. A small company can contract a grinding contractor to process brush from time to time, and a tractor or skid-steer loader could easily manage the composting material on a site of this size.*

*"Small companies can save money by composting in-house, not to mention the value of having a constant supply of mulch and soil amendment to reduce or eliminate bark, mushroom compost, and peat moss purchases.*

● *"Incineration of yard wastes is not a viable option either. Have you ever tried to burn a pile of grass or plant material with an 80 percent moisture content? It doesn't work too well.*

*"More composting sites are coming on line every day, and composting techniques*

*are becoming more sophisticated. By December of 1993, businesses and cities will have a slew of conveniently located sites from which to choose, and lots of beautiful compost to use."*

□ Editorialist Terry McIver says the comment that 10 acres are needed for a workable compost site was based on remarks made at a recent Cleveland symposium on yard waste. "Perhaps one of the speakers was describing a 'best case' scenario," McIver responds.

Bob Smart, of Yard Smart, Inc., contacted again by LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, says his tipping fees at a city site were \$5/ton four years ago. Today, the fee is \$50/ton. He pays more than \$900/month at the site he now uses, from April to June.

"The impact of disposal fees on green industry companies may not be excessive, as you suggest," McIver continues. "Again, my comment was based on the rumblings of a room full of disgruntled landscapers and grass cutters who seemed to think the problem was very real."

McIver points out that Charles Baird (the author who provided the editorial's source material) says the U.S. has plenty of land—not including our precious national parks—which could be converted to landfill sites.

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## Michigan readies new pesticide regs

**LANSING, Mich.**—Attention landscape and turf managers in Michigan. You'll probably work under a more comprehensive set of pesticide laws next season.

Public hearings on Regulation 637, the state's proposed new Pesticide Control Act, should begin by the end of 1991. The state legislature could vote on the measure early in 1992.

Some of the provisions in 637 that will affect professional pesticide users include:

- Registry of sensitive individuals. A Michigan resident will need a doctor's verification to get on the list. Each request will be reviewed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture toxicologist.

The Registry will be published annually and mailed to all licensed applicators. People on the list are to be pre-notified by a hand-delivered letter or by phone at least 24 hours in advance of an application.

- All professional applica-

tors must have a system in place to contain any and all pesticide spills during loading, mixing and all water from washing operations.

- Commercial pesticide applications will be posted.

- Professional applicators will provide customers with a "risk/benefit" statement at the time of, or immediately after, applications. The Department of Agriculture is drafting model language.

Regulation 637 is the handiwork of a work group of pesticide user groups, activist organizations and government agencies. Tim Doppel, president of Atwood Lawn-care, Inc. in Sterling Heights, was a member of the group.

He describes the proposed act as a "major overhaul of the pesticide control act in Michigan."

Complying with 637's pesticide mixing, loading and rinse water requirements will probably be the most costly for turf applicators, he believes.

## Check for reputable designer

**CHICAGO**—Have you ever worked with a "golf course designer" who turned out to be totally unqualified to design anything?

Next time, says Michael Bonallack, check to see if the person is a member of a reputable, professional association.

"Many people have set themselves up as golf course architects without any form of qualification, apart from—in some cases—having been good golfers," says Bonallack,

secretary of the Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland.

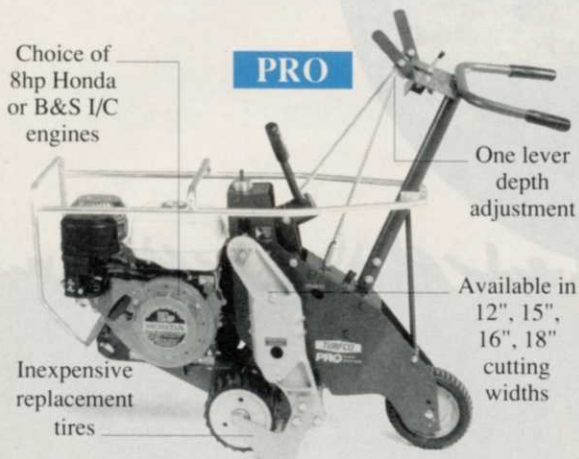
Bonallack is the 1991 recipient of the Donald Ross Award, presented annually by the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Bonallack believes golf courses should be scenic, and not too difficult for the everyday player. The best courses, says Bonallack are those that make the player think.

"The distinctiveness of holes and courses is part of what makes golf great," says Bonallack. "Unlike other sports grounds, every golf course is different and has its own special attractions which can leave a lasting image on the mind."

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## Local notification on hold

**AGAWAM, Mass.**—In August, one of the town councilors in Agawam, Mass., proposed a law requiring lawn care companies to give three days notice prior to applying pesticides.

The notice, to be delivered via registered mail, would go to neighbors of the property being treated. It would list the chemicals to be used in the application.

The proposal exempts farmers and homeowners from any such requirements.

The councilor says the law

is needed to allow homeowners to remove outdoor furniture and children's toys from sprayed areas.

The councilor's notification proposal hasn't generated much support from colleagues. The proposal is now in council's Ordinance Committee.

It's not likely the matter will be decided upon before year's end, LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT was told.

Agawam, with a population 28,000, is a suburb of Springfield.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE TIPS

by Ed Wandtke

■ Last month, effective listening ideas were presented to help the customer service person prepare for a customer's call.

This column will focus on speaking or responding to the customer during a phone call.

1. In responding to a customer, use correct industry nomenclature. This will emphasize that you know what you are talking about, and you will remain in charge of the call. Do not repeat incorrect terminology used by the customer.

2. Repeat phrases the customer speaks. This will help establish a confidence that you understand their concern and will be able to help them. If any confusion exists, this will allow the customer to correct your customer service person's mis-interpretation.

3. The tone of your voice is affected by how you sit in your chair when you are talking. Sitting upright will allow your voice to be clear, strong, and confident. Practice this

on the next call you receive.

4. How do you sound to a customer? Are you friendly? Do you come across as a technical individual? Do you speak positively in responding to a customer? Check yourself out. Tape record the next six customer service calls and see how you sound.

5. Speaking at the same speed and with the same volume as the customer will help the customer feel you understand what they are talking about. This will help to avoid rude and abrasive reactions by the customer. When the customer service person is talking, be certain that they think before they speak rather than saying "uh" first.

All this takes practice. The more you evaluate and review the telephone practices of your customer service personnel, the better your company image. Effective telephone technique takes time and needs to be reviewed. Listen to what is being said on the phone and you will hear words which need to be improved upon.