

Front-page article in 'USA Today' causes concern

Study suggests links between cancers in children and exposures to pesticides in and around home.

■ A study linking pesticide exposure to childhood cancer got front-page coverage on Monday, Feb. 27, in the "USA Today" national newspaper.

Lawn care professionals report varying levels of customer concern.

"A few people called to say that they read the article, and they cancelled because of their concern with chemicals," says Mrs. Richard Ritenour of Ritenour's Custom Lawn Care, Butler, Pa.

"Maybe a half dozen people have mentioned it (the article)," she adds. "Not that many, really. But it does make it tougher for us." Ritenour works with her husband and two sons in the 20-year-old family business.

Gene D. Pool of Emerald Green Lawn Care, Van Wert, Ohio, says he learned about the article as he gathered with about 70 other lawn pros in Washington D.C. on February 27. They were preparing to meet their respective legislators when they learned of it.

"I've got a few calls when I got back home, so I immediately called the 2,4-D Hotline," says Pool. "They sent me lots of information." (2,4-D was one of about six chemicals specifically mentioned in the article.)

Pool says he hand-delivered some of this literature to a concerned female client. So far, though, he doesn't think he's lost any customers because of the article. Even so, he cautions against dismissing it as unimportant.

"If you get four people concerned enough to call you, that might represent 50 other people who are concerned but just don't call," he explains.

Andy Hines of Shrub & Turf, Athens, Ga., says he didn't get a single call that he could trace to the article.

"I think people are so desensitized to the constant publicity about what causes cancer that the perception is that everything causes cancer," he says. "I don't think there's any shock value for it anymore."

But "shock value" describes the "USA Today" headline:

Home pesticide linked to some cancer in kids

Though the writers managed to weave three hot buttons ("pesticide," "cancer"

and "kids") into an eight-word headline, the article itself was brief—little more than a printed sound bite—and to the point. It cited a study published in the American Journal of Public Health by researchers from the University of North Carolina.

They reported that they interviewed the parents

of 252 children diagnosed with cancer between 1976-1983.

They found, according to "USA Today":

- Children whose yards were treated with chemicals were four times as likely to be diagnosed later with soft-tissue sarcomas, malignant tumors of muscle and connective tissue.

- Children whose homes contained pest strips faced 2 1/2-3 times the risk of leukemia.

- Children whose homes had been exterminated for fleas, termites or other bugs faced a slightly elevated risk of lymph cancer.

At the end of the article, the study's lead researcher, Dr. Jack K. Leiss, acknowledged limitations in the published

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EPA wants more info

Lawn pesticides appear to be small problem compared with toxic chemicals stored in unsafe locations within the nation's homes.

■ The U.S. EPA said it has insufficient information to begin regulatory action against pesticides in spite of a study claiming to link childhood cancers to exposures. These claims were made in the study entitled "Home Pesticide Use and Childhood Cancer." It was published in the American Journal of Public Health.

The EPA response four days later in a "Desk Statement" said the specific methods to measure actual exposure in the study "were crude," and that the study did not look at specific chemicals.

"A single epidemiological study only rarely can establish a causative relationship between an exposure and an effect," said the EPA. Even so, the EPA said, "It just makes sense to take reasonable steps to avoid undue exposure."

The EPA added that it has "several activities under way" that will provide a better understanding of the potential risks to children from household pesticide exposures. It also said that it has begun identifying and eliminating a number of carcinogens from the market.

A more obvious problem, the EPA admitted, is the 80,000 children involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings or exposures in 1993 alone.

A survey by the EPA found that:

Almost half—47 percent—of all households with children under the age of five had at least one pesticide stored in an unlocked cabinet, less than four feet off the ground.

About 75 percent of households without children under the age of five also stored pesticides in an unlocked cabinet less than four feet off the ground. This is significant, said the EPA, because 13 percent of all pesticide poisonings occur in homes other than the child's home.

Home pesticide linked to some cancer in kids

By Anita Manning
USA TODAY

Lawn treatments and home pest extermination are associated with an increased risk of cancer in children, says a study in the current American Journal of Public Health. Researchers from the University of North Carolina inter-

dering EPA review because of "concerns about the risks of cancer and neurotoxicity."

► Kids whose homes had been exterminated for fleas, termites or other bugs faced a slightly elevated risk of lymph cancer. Most likely chemicals: Dieldrin, heptachlor, Dursban and chlorpyrifos (Dursban). Chlordane is no longer in

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research. "You cannot infer cause and effect at all....Further research needs to be done to elucidate that," he was quoted as saying.

Although it's small comfort to LCOs, the timing of the article—coming at the height of selling season—could have been worse yet. "USA Today," the most widely read newspaper in the country, boasts a circulation of 1.9 million on Mondays. It jumps to 2.4 million on Fridays.

—Ron Hall

Hurray for complaints!

by Robert Andrews

■ It is hard to argue with the statement that "the primary purpose of business is to create a satisfied customer." If we can accomplish that, most all else will follow.

Hard evidence suggests that companies known for exceptional service can regularly charge higher prices than their competitors. And while outstanding customer service must start at the top, it must also be pervasive throughout the business. It must be consistent, monitored for defects, fine tuned, and constantly updated. It must involve everyone from the owner to

Why people buy

■ Remember that customers tend to consistently buy based on the following reasons:

- ✓ Constant presence of the product or service.
- ✓ Ease of use or installation.
- ✓ Ease of payment for the good or service.
- ✓ Packaging.
- ✓ Timeliness of delivery.
- ✓ Willingness of the vendor to respond to complaints.
- ✓ Information provided on the good or service.

Looking at our own businesses, what can we do to improve the quality of any of the above?

—B.A.

the technician, and to the customer, too.

A recent survey concluded the following reasons why businesses lose customers:

- 9% lured away by lower prices.
- 5% influenced by others to trade elsewhere.
- 3% moved away or left the market place.
- 1% died.
- 68% quit because of perceived discourtesy, poor service, or indifference on

the supplier's part.

• 14% quit because complaints weren't addressed satisfactorily.

While we cannot do much about those who die or move away, we can do a great deal about the 82 percent who stop shopping for reasons directly influenced by ourselves or our employees.

The average business in the United States does not ever hear from 96 percent of its unhappy customers. Most marketing studies claim that for every actual complaint a business receives, another 24 to 26 are not being spoken out loud. Of these silent complaints, six are serious and threaten the firm's relationship with the customer.

Of even greater influence is what certain unhappy customers can do to our company by telling their neighbors or business associates. In other words, the business that we lose may be small compared to the business we will never get.

How can we structure our business so that these non-complainers become complainers?

- 1) Get them to complain.
- 2) Solve those complaints quickly.
- 3) Keep records as to why customers complain.
- 4) Make operational changes based on these records.

—The author is owner of Andrews and Associates, Carmel, Ind. Andrews and wife Jennifer operate two lawn care companies in Indiana.

Marketing: the only way to win

You need more than a 'me too' approach. Learn what makes your customers tick, and offer a 'valuable difference.'

■ If you're not practicing accurate marketing techniques, you'd better start, says Lewis Browning, because there's very little a good marketing plan can't do:

- It defines who your customer is and what services they'll buy from you.
- it determines your location; it is what

attracts customers to your business.

• most importantly, marketing sells products, and Browning is dead serious when he says marketing absolutely determines the success of your business.

It starts with how well you know your customers or prospects. What's their lifestyle, their habits, their income? When are they at home?

"In other words," says Browning, "which customer base is profitable for you? Target a particular market segment and specify the services you'll provide; then, determine what kind of people those services might attract.

"The customer becomes the focus of everything you do."

Browning is the founder of Wall-

Bruning Associates, a management consulting firm in South Carolina.

When it comes to a customer's "economic needs," you've got to find a way to sell a product they want and are willing to pay for, otherwise, predicts Browning, you'll waste time and money pursuing the wrong customers with the wrong service.

Be different!—And don't become a "me too" marketer. "If you're (offering the same services)," warns Browning, "don't copy! If you're doing exactly the same thing as your competitor, you're forced into price competition, and the only thing you can say is 'I can do it cheaper.'"

You've got to find a *valuable difference*.

You can be different in a variety of
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