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A recent symposium sponsored by RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) reviewed the latest on "ideopathic environmental intolerances" (IEI), the phenomenon once known as "multiple chemical sensitivities."

There is no known cause of IEI. Symptoms include dizziness, headaches and nausea. Persons so affected insist it is caused by perfumes, structural or turf pesticides, or other airborne, man-made substances.

Judges now say that causal "suppositions" against manufacturers' products are no longer

valid in courts, but it is expected that scientific testimony will become more complicated as medical experts try to explain how these products might be causing the various ailments.

Attorney William Custer, a guest at the RISE symposium, predicts that IEI cases will continue to

be filed in courts, and the green industry will have to address each case as it comes along.

Lisa Drake, director of public affairs for Monsanto, explains that it's essential that you show compassion to those who claim to be adversely affected by the products you apply to turf.

Drake has had phone conversations with some IEI sufferers who call the Monsanto hotline. It is not fun.

"They feel like you're going to kill them [by continuing to market the products]," says Drake. The callers are also worried about the health of their children.

"I've had [women] beg and plead, mother to mother, 'don't let them continue.' It's a very difficult, highly emotional issue."

Drake says that, to respond to IEI complaints properly, a person needs research findings, intuition and "a great deal of insight."

The downside is that the media want simple "sound-bite"-sized answers.

"If you're not as quotable as you should be,"

says Drake, "it's much more difficult to handle at the media end."

First and foremost on Drake's list of advice:

Apply products safely.

Then, "establish your own personal and media credibility, and the credibility of the applicators who are on the front lines.

"The way you handle people who are suffering will be observed by others: lawyers, the public, legislators and the media. Show credibility when getting your viewpoint across."

Dr. Vince Cavell, of the Columbia School of Health and Medicine, says there are four ways to establish credibility with others:

- 1) Honesty
- 2) Dedication
- 3) Competence
- 4) Empathy

Empathy is the most important, during a telephone call or in-person encounter.

"Listen to the caller," says Drake. "Find out what they want you to do." If you are confronted in person, Drake says to remember that non-verbal communication is important when there is a low level of trust. Do not lose your temper or call them names, and do not give medical advice. Let the person know you're trying to help, but without implicating yourself.

For information on IEI, and advice on how to talk to people who might confront you about the products you use, call RISE at (202) 296-6085. **LM**

Questions, comments? Call Terry at (216) 891-2709, fax at (216) 891-2733 or e-mail at 75553.502@compuserve.com.

A public relations tip: keep your cool



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