

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

It was a done deal

Excuse my naivete with the United States Environmental Protection Agency's pesticide reassessment process. I actually thought that when the Food Quality Protection Act was passed in 1996, the EPA and the specialty pesticides industry would sit down together and figure out how to reasonably estimate exposures of pesticides for children and adults. I thought that many professional users would step forward and tell the Agency just how valuable these chemical products are for landscape management.

Silly me, I thought that the reams and reams of test data and the millions of research dollars spent by the manufacturers to meet the EPA's product registration scrutiny would be taken seriously as a useful body of knowledge.

But the anti-pesticide activists within EPA had another idea, and it was to put their agenda forward without giving the industry's body of knowledge more than lip service. After all, this is a political world and the EPA is one of the more politically active and biased of our federal agencies.

It was clear early on that EPA's regulators had organophosphate products in their sights, and they haven't wavered since. This is their mission — to put organophosphates and other products out of everyone's reach — rather than to build a logical and scientifically valid definition of what's safe and what's not. They changed the rules in the middle of the game, making many of our products vulnerable.

Most of us want manufacturers to keep developing safer, more targeted and more effective products. And many of us really wanted to see realistic definitions of the safe exposure limits. But after EPA made up its

own definitions and its own rules, the "reassessment" process seemed more like a done deal.

What surprised me was the lack of comment or debate from our side of the industry. I didn't hear many product users telling EPA these products are important. I didn't see many industry associations or leaders step up to the bat for this.

Maybe you think it will stop after a few products and you'll still have a variety to use in your control toolbox. I wonder about that, because I hear about several activist networks pushing not only for limitations on use, but also outright bans on pesticides around schools, public parks and even home lawns. These people are organized, determined and vocal.

I'm troubled when I see professionals point fingers at each other, saying, "I don't use that stuff — they're the ones who do." In reality, thousands of you in lawn care, landscaping and grounds management depend on these products.

I hope I'm not naïve to think that someday we'll have a strong, united industry voice to present to government regulators, investors and the public. We sure could have used one recently. In this case, it would have made the EPA think twice before being so cavalier with the products that you use.

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