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Landscape MANAGEMENT

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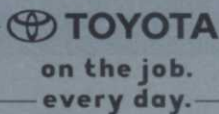
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Circle No. 106 on Reader Inquiry Card

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.

Contact Sue at 440/891-2729 or e-mail at sgibson@advanstar.com

Silly me, I thought the reams of test data and millions of product research dollars would be regarded by the EPA as a useful body of knowledge.



events

WHAT, WHEN & WHERE

July

18-21 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Conference and Field Days / Spokane, WA; 800/405-TURF

22-24 International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Expo / Louisville, KY; 800/558-8767

24-25 PLCAA Legislative Day On The Hill / Washington, D.C.; 800/458-3466

25 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day / West Lafayette, IN; 765/494-8039

25-27 Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show / Fort Washington, PA; 800/898-3411

30-3 Plant Growth Regulation Society of America meeting / Kailua-Kona, HI; www.griffin.peachnet.edu/pgrsa/

30-5 Perennial Plant Symposium and Trade Show / Toronto, Ontario, Canada; 614/771-8431

August

3 University of Illinois Turfgrass, Nursery, Landscape, and Trial Garden Field Day / Urbana, IL; 217/333-7847

4-6 Southern Nursery Association Convention / Atlanta, GA; 770/953-3311

8-12 APLD Summer Conference / Toronto, Ontario; Sponsored by the Association of

Professional Landscape Designers; 630/579-3268

9 Ohio Turfgrass, Landscape, Horticulture Field Day / Columbus, OH; 888/683-3445

9-10 Penn State Turfgrass Field Days / University Park, PA; 814/863-3475

10 Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association's Summer Field Day / Okemos, MI; 800/879-6652

14-18 Florida Turfgrass Association Annual Conference and Show / Gainesville, FL; 800/882-6721

15 Cornell Field Day / Ithaca, NY; 607/255-1792

23 Michigan Turfgrass Field Day / Lansing, MI; 517/321-1660

30-2 CIPA Annual Conference and Exhibitor Showcase / San Jose, CA; 707/462-2276

September

7-8 Southwest Horticultural Trade Show / Phoenix, AZ; 480/966-1610

12-13 Turfgrass and Landscape Research Conferences and Field Days / Riverside, CA; 909/787-4430

13 Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center Field Day / Virginia Beach, VA; 757/363-3906

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202/789-2900



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248/476-5457



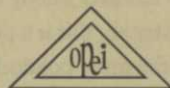
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8260 Willow Oaks Corporate Dr. Suite 120
Fairfax, VA 22031-4513
703/573-3551
www.irrigation.org



National Arborist Association
The Meeting Place Mall,
P.O. Box 1094
Amherst, NH 03031-1094
603/673-3311
www.natlarb.com



Ohio Turfgrass Foundation
1100-H Brandywine Blvd.,
PO Box 3388
Zanesville, OH 43702-3388
888/683-3445



The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute
341 South Patrick St.
Old Town Alexandria, Va. 22314
703/549-7600
opei.mow.org



Professional Grounds Management Society
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PGMS@assnhqtrs.com



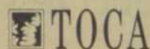
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www.acpa.org/rise



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712/366-2669; 800/323-3875
www.aip.com/stma



Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association
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New Prague, MN 56071
612/758-5811

No reason to turn back now

The genie is out of the bottle and if we use her wisely we'll discover that she'll do wonderful things for us. Her name is biotechnology and she's tantalized us with small proofs that she can help feed the hungry and cure many of our illnesses.

This has led us to investigate what else she can do for us, including developing grasses to better control erosion along our highways, beautify our lawns and reduce the amount of chemicals and water needed to keep the turf on our golf courses green and healthy.

Most of us are willing to give biotechnology a chance to work its magic, but only after we're sure that we can direct it.

Some people, however, don't think that it's possible to control this genie. They fear that engineering the genetic material of living organisms is inviting catastrophe. Others maintain that this technology isn't needed. Some of these people, acting upon these beliefs, commit foolish, destructive acts.

A senseless act

On the evening of June 4, a group calling itself the Anarchist Golfing Association (AGA) traveled a dark, back-country road to the Pure-Seed Testing turfgrass research facility near the farming community of Canby, OR. These people — it's not known how many — entered two greenhouses there and destroyed research on genetically modified creeping bentgrass along with collections of traditionally bred grasses. They also stomped and pulled turfgrasses from research plots outside of the greenhouses. These selections were being evaluated for their resistance to disease or their ability to grow using saline irrigation.

The AGA left other reminders of their attack, including slogans on the walls of the green houses and golf balls with symbols drawn upon them. The vandalism to the turfgrass plants caused the most distress to Pure-Seed Research though. The process of developing improved varieties requires incredible effort.

The raid's irony

What the AGA didn't know (or didn't want to know) when it trashed the seed company was that the research that it damaged was directed at developing turf varieties that require fewer pesticides, less water and grasses that can prosper on saline and waste water.

While the company was, in fact, working on genetically modified bentgrasses, that research was reportedly assessing the suitability and safeguards needed to grow these modified grasses in eastern Oregon. Pure-Seed Research uses traditional selection and breeding methods to develop its varieties.

What effect will the midnight raid have on the grass seed industry? Probably not a lot.

Plant breeders will continue to develop improved grasses through traditional means *and* through genetic manipulation.

The genie of biotechnology has awesome powers to serve us. We just have to make sure we know how to guide her.

**Contact Ron Hall at 440/891-2636
or e-mail at
rhall@advanstar.com**

That genie of biotechnology is out of the bottle, and we can't put her back in. But we can guide her and make her work for us.



Refusing a job because it's not in your area of expertise is professional. It says that you're an expert in what you normally do, but not in that particular task.



Know your boundaries

Recent magazine articles on the sale and consumption of smaller landscape maintenance firms by larger ones show that the trend is toward more efficient, larger and theoretically more profitable companies. But smaller companies must also develop strategies to focus on services suitable for them and how to keep customers from leaving for the big boys.

Your strategy must be clear and focused -- a defined set of services that determine the type of equipment, staffing, customer base and expertise you need for those tasks. One step we all should take is to ask: How far will we go to satisfy our customers with services we don't normally provide and what are we qualified to do? These questions need to be asked before we get in over your head.

Above and beyond

There are two areas of consideration when considering offering "special" services, strategic and tactical. Here are several strategic questions we try to answer before we go any further on a job:

- ▶ Can we make it safe and profitable?
- ▶ Is it something we are qualified to do?
- ▶ Is this a one-time job or a new service we will regularly provide?
- ▶ How successful can the task be?
- ▶ What are the consequences of a problematic completion?
- ▶ What are the long-term affects to the customer?

Then, we look at the tactical, or practical, side of the job:

- ▶ Am I qualified to teach it to my employees?

- ▶ Do we have the necessary equipment?
- ▶ Are we willing to invest in new equipment if we don't already have it?
- ▶ Will we rent equipment?
- ▶ Do we have the necessary licensing?
- ▶ Do we have the necessary insurance?

With these questions in mind, here are our options:

1. Do the job.
2. Hire a subcontractor.
3. Refuse the job.

Take on the job

Just recently, I ran into a manager of an established lawn maintenance firm with an excellent reputation for service. The company, located in southeastern Michigan, also prunes, weeds and mulches the properties of homeowners and commercial sites.

The owner told me that a long-time residential customer asked them to plant a row of Colorado spruces. You may already have guessed that this project was a disaster with long-lasting effects. Although a valuable customer asked for the installation, the manager refused at first, saying that it wasn't the kind of work that he did any longer. He eventually made an exception because he didn't want his customer looking for another contractor who could do the work (and perhaps take over what he had been doing for years). Needless to say, the project was over budget, took too long and the trees died.

You may have acquired some experience performing a certain type of service, but do you know enough about it to be able to teach it to your staff? Those are two different standards. And your staff should understand more than the basics — your employees

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