

The Golf Course Superintendent and The Environmentalist: Friends or Foes?

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THERE IS an irony in this title. I have been a golf course superintendent for 15 years. I grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm and then became a student at one of our land-grant universities.

For all the time that I can recall, I have considered myself an environmentalist. I submit that you could consider almost all Americans environmentalists in the sense that we care about and are deeply concerned about the health of our citizens and the environment in this country. No sane person is anti-environment; all of us want to improve the quality of the lives we live.

Furthermore, many sincere Americans are especially and understandably vigilant about preserving our natural resources and our spectacular environmental assets. In the last 30 years or so however, a vocal and militant environmental faction has emerged that demands bannings, restrictions, and other regulations with no obvious or apparent regard for the risk/benefit equation. I consider this faction environmental extremists. I am most interested in those extremists who preach gloom and doom as a result of agricultural chemicals and pesticides. These people and their proposals can potentially damage, ruin, or even end much of what we do as managers of fine turf. To answer, early on, the question "Environmentalists — Friends or Foes?" is to respond that the fanatic and emotional group to which I refer could be nothing but an adversary of a professional golf course manager.

THOSE CHARGED with the responsibility of using agricultural pesticides are aware of the benefits of these products. On our golf courses in Wisconsin, in June, untreated bluegrass rough areas frequently are severely damaged by *helminthosporium* leaf spot. In August, the flowering ornamental crabapple that missed a preventive



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dormant spray stands out because of its declining foliage. I recall vividly farm pastures not sprayed with 2, 4-D and a corn field that wasn't treated with atrazine. In both cases, decreased yields were obvious.

More than these, and nearly endless other and varied examples of the value of pesticides, was an experience I had almost 20 years ago. I served my Army tour of duty in an underdeveloped country that was steeped in severe poverty. It did not then, nor does it today, have the ability to feed and clothe itself. Those terrible scenes of poor people are repeated around the world, in Mexico, Central America, South America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Populations in those countries have not experienced the contributions of science, technology, improving health, agriculture, food, clothing, energy, housing, transportation, industrial development, and, yes, even recreation. These factors all contribute to the high standards of living we Americans enjoy today and, unfortunately, that many of our brethren around the world do not. No amount of vituperative dia-

tribes from environmental extremists will change the fact that the use of agricultural pesticides has contributed mightily to our higher standard of living.

It seems to me that most Americans are relatively satisfied with the substantial, even formidable, improvement in our standard of living in the past 30 or 40 years. Yet the promoters of toxic terror seem to imply that we must go back to the methods of the 1930s — the good old days before pesticides, commercial fertilizers, and synthetic products. Believe me, one week of those good old days would create more havoc than this nation has seen in a lifetime. We would not enjoy life as it is today without the use of agricultural chemicals and pesticides. It is interesting to note that if we were to achieve 1980 agricultural production with 1940 technology, we would have to cultivate an estimated 430 million additional acres of land.

These environmentalists are a formidable opponent for many reasons. Despite their small numbers — which include a few scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and consumer advocates — they have been able to convince millions of Americans that there is nothing but bad news about the environment in this country. How are they able to do this even though evidence and logic almost never support their position?

FIRST, THEY use emotion and horror. Fear is an easy emotion to generate and a difficult one to dispel. We are all afraid of cancer, birth defects, infertility, and radiation burns — many of the things environmentalists warn us about. Secondly, as a group they are good communicators. They are able to give impassioned speeches that often have nothing to do with reality. Many are good writers — the list of anti-chemical and anti-industrial books and articles is endless. One of the best in this group is Rachel Carson, whose carefully crafted book *Silent Spring* is full of



undocumented “could”s, “seemingly”s, “possibly”s, and “apparently”s. In fact, she is most responsible for taking the environmental movement into the big time.

Environmental extremists are very effective in capturing the attention of the press, again most commonly by instilling fear of unknown disasters. And let’s face it — fear makes news because fear is interesting. These environmentalists seem also to be keenly aware that bad news is big news and that good news is not only boring — it is seldom news. For example, statistics showing that American health has never been better seldom receive play in the press. In fact, statistics such as this are often reversed when they are presented as news stories — life expectancy is up and this creates more stress on an already shaky Social Security system. Good news is turned around and presented as bad news.

The same thing is done with increased agricultural efficiency because of agricultural chemicals; that good news of low food costs is cast as a problem with exports, surpluses, and the overall farm problem. The good news is portrayed as bad news, demonstrating once again that controversy and sensationalism are good for ratings on television and sell books and magazines.

Those on the extreme end of the environmental movement are usually on the offensive, making wild claims, exaggerating relatively small incidents, and quoting data out of context. It is far

easier, in my judgment, to present your case than it is to be on the defensive, stating no problem exists or pointing to the data that have no relevance in science. It is also almost impossible to prove a negative, which compounds the difficulty of the offensive/defensive situations.

A raft of other reasons are responsible for successes of environmental zealots. They are well funded because of the obvious appeal of their cause as it is perceived by the general public. They enlist the awesome support of government bureaucracies, and once the bureaucratic juggernaut has been set in motion, almost nothing can stop it. They have learned not to deal with specifics of an issue — they are generalists. They overcome, to some extent, their lack of scientific data by quoting, requoting, and quoting again and again the same few scientists within their relatively small group.

A good doomsayer never ever under any circumstances mentions any benefits of agricultural chemicals, no matter how substantial they might be, and he always stresses their *potential* disadvantages. You will never hear extremists discuss the cost of an environmental regulation; not only will they ignore what portion of our economic resources will have to be committed, but they won’t address impacts on our standard of living and health. And finally, in their we-against-them approach, there is always the chemical industry, nuclear industry, agribusiness, or the industrial/

military complex. These are all easy targets for almost any criticism.

IT IS FAIRLY easy to define a problem and visit about it. Offering answers and solutions is a lot more complex and challenging. That difficulty is amplified when the problem is as pervasive as this one. How can we most effectively deal with the environmental extremists of the 1980s whose goal is the wide-scale restriction of man-made chemicals in *all* facets of society, not just the agricultural chemicals critical to the golf course industry?

1. The most important thing we can do is to recognize that we do have a serious responsibility — legal and moral — to use pesticides in the way and the purposes for which they were intended. Any action or program that lends itself to that end deserves our support and participation. Pesticide applicator training and registration programs, increased use of integrated pest management programs, in-house safety and awareness programs, are a few specific examples. Negligence of any kind cannot be accepted.

2. Education on all fronts is critical. Educate employees — as I’ve mentioned. Educate players on how essential pesticides are for good golf turf production. Educate friends and neighbors. We need to close the gap between the consensus in the scientific and medical communities on environmental issues and that which is presented in the popular media. This can best be done through educational opportunities, whenever and wherever they may come and without regard to how informal they may be.

3. I believe we need to organize. We have done that in Wisconsin and done it in a way that deserves to be a model for other states. In December 1983, the FORESTRY/RIGHTS-OF-WAY/TURF Coalition was formed. Today, FROWT — as we are given to call it — has 700 members. We have an executive director, an office and staff. The Coalition follows pesticide issues in turfgrass management, forestry and rights-of-way and makes certain that both sides of an issue are presented. Legislation is monitored, and members are kept abreast of proposals that might affect them. Public relations and education are key elements in all that FROWT does. Executive director Russ Weisensel is a tremendous resource for golf courses in Wisconsin.

4. On occasion we may have to legislate. The chance to do this directly doesn't come very often. Most frequently we can try to influence legislation that affects us through a lobbyist (such as FROWT), by attending committee hearings and giving testimony when possible and, finally, by *voting* for those individuals most likely to represent our interests.

5. There are times we have to litigate. This option makes me nervous, simply because I'm like the majority of people who'd rather not ever be involved in court proceedings, but in Wisconsin we faced a situation that offered no other options. The FROWT Coalition and a Christmas tree grower in the town of Casey, in Washburn County, are suing the town board of supervisors over an ordinance adopted in June 1983 that

prohibits the use of herbicides on public lands and roadways and on private lands subject to public use (such as golf courses) without town board approval. It also prohibited aerial application of herbicides on any land without approval. The key point of our lawsuit against the town of Casey is "whether or not local units of government have jurisdiction in regulating pesticides." It is clear that pesticide use has been the subject of extensive federal and state legislation. There are nearly 2,000 municipalities in Wisconsin; and if each one is allowed to enact its own set of regulations, it would essentially be impossible to conduct business in our state. We had to sue to try to prohibit a patchwork of conflicting regulations. We need to confirm the preemptive nature of federal and state pesticide laws and regulations.

6. Finally, there is good logic in trying to establish a dialogue with environmental extremists. If litigation is frightening, then this is frustrating. Too often I am guilty of arguing with them when a confrontation occurs. However, it is a wise person who establishes channels of communications; his position can only benefit.

Involvement may best express what I am trying to say. Logic is on our side. Science is on our side. The welfare of America and Americans is on our side. If we fail to serve these interests by not defending our right to use pesticides and agricultural chemicals, we will have failed our profession. We will deserve the consequences.

I am one environmentalist who believes golf courses are a vital part of our environment.

The Forgotten Magic of Lime

by **WILLIAM H. BENGUEYFIELD**
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THIS IS an editorial, and editorials are meant to stimulate thought; to introduce opinion relating to the facts. "The Forgotten Magic of Lime" is both the subject and the fact.

The fact is that many experienced men, men who have been studying and observing fine turf for over 70 years, have been convinced and can prove the value of lime — either calcium carbonate (ground limestone) or calcium hydroxide (hydrated lime) in managing fine golfing turf. There is no question of this.

Lime was one of the first chemicals used on turfgrasses in this country. Can you believe that lime, under certain soil conditions, can actually *cause* grass to grow? Ask any dairy farmer why he limes his pastures? He'll tell you lime grows more grass and that means more milk in the pail and that means more profit in the farmer's pocket. It is a basic fact.

When the U.S. Amateur was played at The Country Club, in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1934 (just as the Open will be played there in 1988), lime was used for lines around every green to control the gallery of that day. Now we use



O. J. Noer, 1958. One of the earliest and best turfgrass consultants.

yellow ropes for the purpose. Twenty years later, in 1954, a very dry spring occurred in New England. Strikingly noticeable narrow, dark green grass growth lines appeared around every green, caused, naturally enough, by the lime application 20 years earlier. Pictures prove this phenomenal fact.

Last summer a young golf course superintendent asked what he could do to substantially reduce the deep accumulation of thatch on his greens. His membership was upset. Footprinting was very much in evidence on the greens, and this young fellow was under a lot of pressure.

I recalled a lesson taught many years ago by O. J. Noer, one of the pioneers of turfgrass management for golf. I was making a golf course visit with O. J. in Victorville, California, in 1954. The greens had a lot of thatch on them, and O. J. said, "You'd be smart to apply some hydrated lime to these greens two or three times a year for the next couple of years. Put on about two pounds per 1,000 square feet in the early spring, early summer, and again in the fall. In a year or two, you'll have a lot less thatch."