

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Attitude Adjustment

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OK, maybe it was a real hard season and everybody was just tired. Record heat, drought conditions, and major floods have that effect on people. The general mood of many superintendents was not good in August. Just ask one. Well, now it's January, and the past is the past and hopefully all of those bad memories are gone, at least for the superintendents where the snow is falling. Things have probably slowed down, allowing a little time for philosophical thought and a well-earned vacation. Put aside the airline schedules for a minute, get another cup of coffee, and read this. It may inspire some thought or at least make that vacation even more desirable.

I am sure by now everyone is very familiar with the controversies surrounding pesticide use on the golf course. Public concern over pesticides continues to grow. Even golfers are becoming cynical about pesticide applications and are questioning their need. Golf courses often are unfairly targeted in this issue. Much of the information the public receives is biased and sensationalized. Both the USGA and GCSAA currently are funding research projects that will provide fundamental, scientific data regarding pesticide fate and human exposure. The data from these projects will be used to make more rational decisions and policy concerning pesticides and their use.

With all that said, it is still safe to assume that a fair number of pesticide products currently used will not be available in future years. Companies will voluntarily choose to

remove products from production to avoid re-registration costs. Other products will be eliminated due to toxicity or potential mobility. States such as California and New York rarely see new pesticides registered, which further limits the chemical tools available for management. All chemical applications may have to be formally justified. One can only guess what effects the preemption cases might have on the local scale. I am not trying to paint a bleak picture, but changes are occurring and are likely to continue.

Does this spell disaster for the turf manager and the industry? Of course not. The job certainly would not get any easier, but the most qualified superintendents would survive, and may even flourish, as their overall management skills are better recognized. Management would obviously change. Maintenance programs again would be based on sound cultural practices, such as water management, cultivation, fertility, and mowing operations. Tournaments and outings would no longer dictate timing for important maintenance tasks. Increased emphasis would be placed on proper construction and more practical designs that provide effective drainage, good soils, adequate sunlight, and good air movement. Turf species would again be grown in the climatic zones for which they are adapted. Reconstructing problem greens would become increasingly popular, and a tree removal recommendation would not raise a single eyebrow. Even the research emphasis would likely change.

So far, so good, but there is one small detail . . . the golfer.

This is where I believe increased restrictions on pesticide use would actually have a positive effect. It would quickly be realized that demands for championship conditions for everyday play are not realistic. Those demands would soon end with the ensuing turf loss that would likely occur. Emphasis would have to be placed on obtaining consistent, smooth surfaces with green speeds based on growing conditions. Unfair comparisons between your golf course and tournament golf courses on television would no longer be taken seriously. Golfers would have no choice but to tolerate some pest-related damage, and more emphasis would again be placed on playability as opposed to appearance. The golfers might even turn their attention more to the game itself and less to slight blemishes or inconsistencies that have somehow become so important in today's game.

I am not condoning a ban on all pesticides or severely increased restrictions. However, pesticides should not be used as a crutch to help overcome major cultural deficiencies or to meet unrealistic demands. Additional restrictions governing pesticide availability and use are likely to become a reality, and we must anticipate what effects those changes might have. A little change of attitude might be just what we need to bring our maintenance programs back to reality.