

An Ill-Fated Concept?

Integrated pest management: Is it viable in today's game?

BY JIM SKORULSKI

Integrated pest management (IPM) is practiced, at least to some degree, at just about every golf course, but seldom, if ever, is a complete IPM program practiced for the entire golf course.

Heavy play, busy event schedules, earlier tee times, staffing shortages, fear, complacency, golfer apathy, and ever-increasing demands for perfection are all legitimate roadblocks to implementing IPM programs. Does that mean that IPM is an ill-fated concept?

As an industry, we advocate the use of IPM principles and are quick to defend our management programs as being environmentally sound, and most are. But (be truthful, now) how many IPM principles are you really employing in your pest management decisions, and can you do more? The following are some good questions you can use to evaluate whether your IPM program is up to par.

- Are you following a formal IPM protocol or management plan?
- Have key pest problems been identified and an up-to-date, organized database developed for each pest?
- Is a formalized monitoring program in place and a daily journal or record of all pest activity and abiotic stresses being maintained?
- Have you been able to modify cultural programs to reduce environmental and pest pressures?
- Are specific treatment thresholds being used for even a few pests?
- Are any biological agents being used?

Is there any hope? I think there is, as most of you are probably incorporating some of these very basic IPM principles in the field. If you are not, then it's time to reevaluate your programs. The next step is to piece those concepts together to develop a more complete and mean-

ingful IPM program. With a little coaxing and a few ideas you can do just that.

So how might this be done? First, you have to determine what concepts can be integrated into your management programs based on the available resources, time, traffic, and membership attitudes. Not all the concepts may be workable or practical for an operation at a given time, and a complete IPM program may not be feasible for the entire golf course. If that is the case, then think small. Consider implementing a more thorough IPM program for fairways alone, where management programs are generally less intensive. The potential to reduce pesticide usage over the larger fairway acreage arguably would have a greater benefit than a similar program for greens. A reduction in the chemical budget may also be realized. If not fairways, then consider a more thorough IPM protocol for primary rough areas or sand bunker banks and green surrounds. Even non-turf areas such as ponds or ornamentals and tree plantings are excellent candidates for IPM. Starting small will require fewer resources, help build confidence, and develop a template that can be used to expand the programs further.

Another option for implementing an IPM approach is to do so for an individual pest or pest complex over the entire golf course. Such an approach should be possible and effective against specific weeds, insects, or diseases. Concentrating on a single primary pest may be less daunting and more practical, and the successes provide the impetus for more extensive IPM programs.

The possibilities and options for using IPM on golf courses are many. The traditional IPM approach we were taught in school and used in agricultural

and forestry systems probably will not be practical or effective for golf courses. However, be progressive and creative to mold an IPM strategy that has the potential to work under your conditions. To be successful, you will have to remain open to new technologies and find innovative ways to solve difficult problems. Turfgrass researchers and agronomists will also have to remain open-minded and bring to market new tools and ideas that are both practical to implement and effective for managing pests. Perhaps the biggest challenge will be to modify a mind-set that demands absolute perfection and consistency that are unattainable and contrary to responsible pest management. That is the responsibility of the entire industry.

So is IPM an ill-fated concept in today's game? It does not have to be. Sure, there are difficult issues that must be addressed, but implementing a more comprehensive IPM management approach may not be as hard as you think. Plant the seed for the IPM concept in course officials, supervisors or owners, as well as your staff. Reevaluate your current management programs and develop a pest management plan for the upcoming season. Obtain a copy of the IPM Protocols developed by the University of Massachusetts. Try to hire a pest management specialist who can take the time to develop and implement more formalized IPM on the golf course. Be alert for and open to all the new and promising technologies that will increase your management capabilities.

This is not the time to have a business-as-usual attitude. Yes, our industry tries very hard to protect the environment while producing the best playing conditions possible. But more can and should be done. Make a conscious effort to learn more about your pest management options and give IPM a second chance. The fate of our industry just may depend on it.

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