

# Just The Facts, Ma'am, Just The Facts

Searching for the truth about pesticides and their impact on the environment.

BY BRIAN MALOY

Studies associating pesticides with cancer led radio commentator Paul Harvey to speculate that pesticides applied to golf courses “might be killing people.” How is that for an attention grabber?

Unfortunately, a number of well-intentioned environmentalists will conjure up vivid, emotional images. In many instances, facts are blown out of proportion in an effort to solicit support and attention for their cause. Making matters worse, it seems that some media representatives are more interested in getting their next hot story than dispensing a realistic risk analysis.

In the United States today, it has become a considerable challenge for people to decipher fact from fiction with regard to pesticides and the environment. There is a tremendous misunderstanding in our society about pesticides. Facts are boring, while telling emotional stories and fallacies peaks television ratings. It is human nature to be intrigued and curious about the abnormal or unusual.

For example, picture in your mind little 5-year-old Billy playing in his backyard. He decides to crawl under the fence that separates his parents' yard from the neighboring nuclear power

plant facility. Billy jumps into an unsupervised large vat of dihydrous-oxide. Fear creeps into your mind as you begin to worry about Billy's outcome.

Later, a television news team discovers Billy as his mom pulls him from the vat of dihydrous-oxide. His fingers and toes are wrinkled and his skin is red. It's a touching sight as the mother is reunited with her lost child. Shortly thereafter, a spokesperson from the power plant shows up for questioning. The reporter fires, “How could you let poor little Billy gain access to that chemical vat?”

The spokesperson responds, “We had the perimeter surrounded with an eight-foot fence and a sign that says, ‘No Trespassing!’”

The reporter replies, “You know that 5-year-olds can't read. Well, what was the chemical in the vat, anyway?”

The spokesperson answers, “Dihydrous-oxide, or more commonly referred to as water.”

Perhaps you were expecting to read next that Billy had chemical burns covering 90 percent of his body.

I know, you feel let down; the story lost its luster once the facts on the subject were made available. Similarly, the story is not nearly as exciting when pesticides are used according to their

label directions. Did you know the EPA requires hundreds of toxicological studies, and that millions of dollars are spent with independent researchers, and that it takes ten years or more before a pesticide can be granted registration for use in the marketplace? I guess some people feel that's still not enough to ensure our safety. I wonder if any of those well-intentioned individuals have calculated what the consequences or damages would be if pest outbreaks were not curtailed in crops. Would there be enough food to feed the world? Or, how many people would die from allergic reactions from fire ant bites if there were no control? Using pesticides responsibly protects golfers from mosquitoes and the ticks that carry Lyme disease. Pesticides also reduce pollen levels and subsequent allergies. It is a mistake to assume that because pesticides kill certain pests, they are necessarily a threat to non-target wildlife or humans.

In searching for good scientific information, the USGA Green Section has spent more than \$21 million since 1983 directed towards turfgrass research. A large percentage of those funds have been appropriated towards answering questions concerning pesticides and their impact on the surrounding environment.

For more information pertaining to pesticides and their impact on the environment, visit the USGA Website at [www.usga.org/green](http://www.usga.org/green) for details on unbiased, independent university research. Hopefully, more people will do their own detective work to separate fact from fiction concerning pesticides and their impact on the environment. As Joe Friday from *Dragnet* so often put it, “Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts!”

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