

# *Force of Nature*

A report on the « environmental movement » for the Green Space Industry from an independent perspective.



## ***Organic Golf Courses.***

For many years, public scrutiny of golf course maintenance practices, as well as an expanding organic industry, have forced many golf clubs to re-think the use of synthetic fertilizers and pest control products. (Nelson, 2005.) However, the « Golf Course Industry » is now facing a new challenge from environmentalists. The so-called « organic » or « pesticide-free » golf courses. Some people think that this has become a major trend in the industry.

According to the militant environmental movement group « Pesticide Free Ontario » ...



*<< With a set time frame and prescribed regulations, golf courses should become pesticide-free. There are several examples of organic or pesticide-free golf courses in Canada. >>*  
(PFO, 2008.)

And more recently, the « Ontario New Democratic Party » (N.D.P.), with its environment critic Peter Tabuns, who has supported the banning of pest control products, has expressed another of its misinformed views concerning the « Golf Course Industry » —

*<< While more and more golf courses in Canada are going pesticide-free, the vast majority of Ontario's 800 golf courses still use pesticides. >>*  
(NDP, September 2008.)



Here are the facts. In recent years, an infinitesimally small number of « renegade » golf clubs have suspiciously claimed that they are « organic » and « pesticide-free ». There are no industry standards.

There are approximately two thousand golf courses across Canada. There are three known so-called « organic » golf courses in Canada — « Fiddler's Green Golf Course », « Blackburn Meadows Golf Club », and « Wild Splendour Golf Course ». These types of courses often do not have « high-end » playing conditions, which can be inadequate. Nor do these clubs seem to have difficult growing conditions. We will explain these things in the next segments.

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We wish to thank « Force of Nature » without whose assistance this report would not have been possible.

## ***Organic Golf Courses.***

### **Fiddler's Green Golf Course.**

This government course was established in **1999** at Williams Point, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia. This club claims that it is ...

| << *Canada's First Organic Golf Course.* >> |

According to a local journalist, this club represents ...

| << *an environmental philosophy which presents this course as an example of modern thinking about golf courses* >> (FGCC.) |



### **Blackburn Meadows Golf Club.**

This is a nine-hole course that was established in **1992** at the remote Saltspring Island in British Columbia. Some of the rough at Blackburn is so long that the players' ball can be lost. It claims that it is ...

| << *Canada's #1 Organic Golf Course.* >> |

Blackburn Meadows also claims that —

| << [ It is ] *the first fully organic golf course in Canada. [ ... ] Constructed over a two year period from 1990-92, our greens and fairways are lovingly maintained using only natural organic methods.* >> |

| << *Blackburn Meadows is part of the Blackburn and Cusheon Lake watersheds which provide drinking water to our island homes. By keeping our course pesticide- and chemical fertilizer-free, we are able to nurture these watersheds and provide golfers with the unique experience of a golf course that features a salmon spawning creek, and natural wetlands that are nesting habitats for numerous bird species and a large beaver colony in our lake.* >> |

| << *And, while organic maintenance means that occasionally the turf may be a bit rougher looking than you may be used to, our many golfers assure us that the quality of play is always high and our greens are perfect just the way they are !* >> (BMGC.) |

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## **Organic Golf Courses.**



### **Wild Splendor Golf Course.**

This golf club was last reported to have opened in spring **2007**, located near Sherwood Park, near Edmonton, Alberta. The club claims to be ...

**<< Alberta's first organic golf course. >>**

Wild Splendor also claims that —

**<< The fairways, greens and tee boxes will be pesticide and herbicide free, and covered with a mixture of natural and native grasses. « Going with the more native grasses will lessen your amount of disease and stress, and they're more in tune with the usage of water, » said course designer Bob More. « Wild Splendor will also keep golfers and wildlife healthier because no harmful chemicals will be sprayed, » he said. >>**

**<< Golfer Rob Brazeau said chemicals on the golf course is something he worries about. « When you see chemicals and guys in white suits from head to toe spraying, and you're just walking on and picking up your ball and cleaning it, it creates a little bit of concern, » he said. >>**

**<< « Golfers expect perfect turf. Going organic can pose challenges for superintendents and it can also be a challenging sell. Many golfers aren't willing to accept less than perfect turf, » said More. >>**  
(WSGC.)

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## **Organic Golf Courses.**

### **The Vineyard Golf Club.**

In **2000**, developers obtained approval to build an 18-hole golf course on the island of Martha's Vineyard, situated just off the coast of Massachusetts, in the United States. The site is composed of a sandy topsoil that is very well-drained. One of the thirty-six conditions required for the approval included the use of natural organic fertilizers and the banning of any traditional pest control products. Once established, this golf course has faced its share of fatal pest problems, including Dollar Spot disease, Oriental Beetle Grub insects, Pythium disease, Skunks, Take-All Patch disease, and Weeds (which must be removed by hand). (Carlson, 2006.)



Very labour-intensive hand-weeding, and Dollar Spot disease problems that will disrupt any golf putting green playing surface, on an « organic » golf course. (Carlson, 2006.)



### **So-called chemical-free golf courses are atypical.**

Within the « Golf Course Industry », so-called « organic » golf courses are not typical. Their temperate climate and low number of players do not represent the vast majority of clubs. In the United States, a report from the « Vineyard Golf Club » has identified those atypical conditions which are ideal for the maintenance of « pesticide-free » turf. — (Carlson, 2008.)

<< Less than 1% of the grass on the course is *Poa annua*. This course is a walking course. We have very few trees and no plans for a tree planting program. The course has less than 10,000 rounds per year. Because it is surrounded with water (an Island), the weather is temperate; rarely in the 90s, prolonged stretches of high humidity are unusual even in August and the wind almost always blows. >>

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## ***Organic Golf Courses.***

### **Why can't every golf course be chemical-free ???**

The « environmental movement » will argue that « organic » courses are innovative industry leaders. If they can do it, why can't everybody else ??? Here is a statement from the « David Suzuki Foundation » —

<< We see no reason why Ontario operators could not follow in the footsteps of these industry leaders and conform to similar standards to reduce their environmental impact. >> (Gue, May 2008.)



Sorry David. There are no industry leaders for « organic » golf courses.

### **The problems faced by a typical golf course.**

| Most 18-hole golf courses are subject to a brutal 30,000 to 50,000 rounds of golf per year. Many courses have wear problems due to player traffic and gold cars that are far beyond their original design capabilities. Such conditions will lead to added pest problems.

| Most golf courses are not situated in temperate climates. Most courses are exposed to brutal extremes in weather conditions. Additionally, most turfgrasses found on the golf course have difficulties tolerating intense heat and drought stress during the summer months, and severe cold temperatures in winter. Such conditions lead to added pest problems. Extreme intemperate climates will kill turfgrasses.

| Most golf courses are composed of annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*). This species is susceptible to a wide array of pest problems and disorders. Annual bluegrass is extremely persistent, but it is well-adapted to golf course conditions.

| Most golf courses must provide players with high-end playing conditions in order to remain competitive in the market.

| Most golf courses cannot afford to lose business because of uncontrolled pest problems that disrupt playing conditions. For example, pests can effectively disrupt the smooth playing surface of a putting green. They must be controlled.

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## ***Organic Golf Courses.***

| Most golf courses are not walking golf courses. Most players use golf cars in order to get around on the course. Golf cars are also a crucial source of revenue for golf clubs, but they represent a great source of wear and tear. Consequently, turf becomes even more susceptible to a number of pests and disorders.

| Most golf courses cannot afford the manpower to remove weeds manually. The average 18-hole course has a maintenance crew of six. Most of the employee time is devoted to mowing turf. There is sometimes little time to do much else during the growing season.

| Many golf courses have large numbers of mature shade trees. Large trees create pests and disorders related to poor air circulation and shade. Most courses are averse to remove any trees since they contribute greatly to the quality of the green space.

| Many golf courses have serious soil drainage problems. Soil becomes compacted because of traffic. Many courses have been built on locations chronic bad drainage. Poor drainage can lead to a variety of pest problems and disorders. It is an expensive problem to manage.

| Most golf courses need the use of pest control products to compensate for the wide array of pest problems and disorders caused by severe traffic, weather extremes, sensitive grass species, shade trees, and poor drainage. The chemical « alternatives » proposed by various governments and the environmental movement simply do not work. They have no expertise in the field of golf course maintenance. A « zero pesticide regime » will lead to dead grass on the golf course.

### **References.**

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<< *Blackburn Meadows Golf Club.* >>  
<http://www.blackburnmeadows.com/course.html>

Carlson, 2006.

<< *An Organic Approach to Golf Course Management.* >>

From the U.S.G.A. Green Section Record. July/August, 2006.

The official publication of the United States Golf Association Green Section.

The author is Carlson, Jeffrey W. Vineyard Golf Club.

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Carlson, 2008.

<< *It's Not Easy Being Green : An Organic Approach to Golf Course Management at the Vineyard Golf Club.* >>

From the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Rutgers Turfgrass Symposium.

Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. January 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

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## ***Organic Golf Courses.***

Gue, May 2008.

<< *Comments on Proposed Legislative Amendments to the Pesticides Act to Ban the Use and Sale of Pesticides for Cosmetic Purposes.* >>

From a letter written on behalf of the David Suzuki Foundation.

The author of the letter is Gue, Elizabeth. May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008.

NDP, September 2008.

<< *NDP and Majority of Ontarians Supports Golf Course Pesticide Phase-Out.* >>

From the Ontario New Democratic Party (N.D.P.). September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

The author is anonymous. <http://ontariondp.com/node/2148>

Nelson, 2005.

<< *Is Inorganic Or Organic In ?* >> From the U.S.G.A. Green Section Record.

The official publication of the United States Golf Association Green Section.

January/February, 2005. The author is Nelson, Matt. Agronomist.

[http://www.usga.org/turf/green\\_section\\_record/2005/jan\\_feb/inorganic.html](http://www.usga.org/turf/green_section_record/2005/jan_feb/inorganic.html)

PFO, 2008.

<< *Action Alert.* >>

From Pesticide Free Ontario. Formerly Campaign for Pesticide Reduction Ontario.

The authors are Susan Koswan, Tania Orton, Sari Merson, and Janet May.

<http://www.pesticidereform.ca/Submitcomments.htm>

WSGC.

<< *Organic Golf Coming to Alberta.* >> (Wild Splendor Golf Course.)

From CBC News. Monday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The author is anonymous.

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/calgary/story/2006/07/10/organic-golf.html>

William H. Gathercole holds a degree in Horticulture from the « *University of Guelph* », and another pure and applied science degree from « *McGill University* ». He has worked in virtually all aspects of the Green Space Maintenance Industry, including public relations, personal safety, and environmental safety. Mr. Gathercole has been a consultant and instructor for decades. His involvement in environmental issues reached a fevered pitch in the **1990s**, when he orchestrated, with others, legal action against unethical and excessive municipal regulations restricting the use of pest control products. (i.e. the Town of Hudson.) Although he can be accused of being « *anti-environment-movement* », he is, in fact, simply a strong advocate for the Green Space Maintenance Industry. Nonetheless, his vast knowledge of our long journey with environmental issues is « *undeniable* ». (**Hopefully !**) Be warned. Mr. Gathercole may sometimes be very irreverent with his presentations. He is a contributing columnist for « *TURF & Recreation* » Magazine, Canada's turf and grounds maintenance authority.

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