



[RISE 25th Anniversary]

Looking Back: The Rise of RISE

RISE - 25th RISE Anniversary

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- | • Anne Nagro

At the risk of sounding simple, RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) started with a single phone call.

“It was Joe Lieberman making noise that initiated the conversation,” recalled Bill Culpepper, president of life sciences company SePRO and a founder of RISE. He woke one morning in 1989 to the former U.S. Senator questioning the use of pesticides and herbicides on turfgrass and lawns.

Activist groups had begun arguing these products — used in public spaces like golf courses, athletic fields and parks — were harmful to people, pets and

the environment. Manufacturers, they claimed, were selling unsafe products; state and federal pressure increased.

Eventually Senator Lieberman's concerns blossomed into Capitol Hill hearings with Senator Harry Reid. The hearings were "horrible" and "staged in an era when staging wasn't so common," recalled Bob Rosenberg, CEO of the National Pest Management Association. It was "a black eye for the lawn care industry but it spilled over to the pest control industry," he said.

For Culpepper, it was a wake-up call in more ways than one. With "no industry organization whatsoever" for the emerging turf and lawn care business, attacks like this were likely to happen again and perhaps with greater intensity, and "we were not prepared to have a discussion to defend ourselves," he said.

Culpepper, who at the time was director of non-agricultural products at Elanco Products, phoned his counterpart at Ciba-Geigy (now Syngenta). The two agreed to call colleagues at other green industry companies; the group met at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America meeting that year in Anaheim, Calif. "Not everybody was as passionate or concerned as we were," but "most had been impacted to some extent and were beginning to ask the question, what do we do as an industry," recalled Culpepper.

Over the next two years the group hammered out the association's mission and structure and formed a partnership with CropLife America (then the National Agricultural Chemicals Association). This let RISE operate as a separate entity but tap existing legal and administrative support functions. The alliance made sense as many manufacturers made active ingredients for both agricultural and specialty product markets. RISE also was fundamentally inclusive: Beside manufacturers, its membership included product formulators and distributors.

With 12 member companies, RISE officially started in 1991, hiring Allen James, its first president, that February. James was charged with building the association, speaking for the industry, and working with other groups like the NPMA, GCSAA and NALP (formerly PLANET) to build an ally base.

Finally, industry people didn't have to "throw somebody else under the bus to take the pressure off of themselves," recalled Dave Morris, a former RISE governing board chair and global business leader for Dow AgroSciences who now leads the company's seeds affiliates business. "We didn't want anybody to be the problem, because that meant there was a problem." RISE "really made sense because you could pool your resources and have a unified voice on an issue," he said.

Preemption Challenges Heat Up.

And it was just in time. On June 21, 1991, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Wisconsin Public Intervenor v. Mortier* that local governments had the power under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to regulate pesticides in their own jurisdictions. For decades prior, FIFRA was viewed as preempting state and local regulations. The ruling was a game-changer with the potential for 83,000 local units of government to enact their own pesticide laws.

RISE, along with CropLife America and a host of other organizations, led the initiative to pass state pesticide preemption laws. Within a few years, the coalition had successfully passed laws in 41 states.

"There's probably not much of anything today that you could write and get enacted into law in 40 states, particularly something that's limiting municipalities' ability to regulate pesticides," said Rosenberg. "It was an enormous accomplishment" and it would be a "very different" industry today without those laws in place, he said.

In the fall of 1991, RISE won a local battle in Missoula, Mont., that secured its future. The city had proposed a ban on pesticide use for lawn care. It was the association's first chance to "prove we had some value to the industry," recalled James. Through advocacy and media and education campaigns, RISE defeated the referendum.

"That was an early and very important challenge" that had national implications, said James. "Our industry began to believe in what we could do. Membership recruitment became quite easy after that." By year's end, RISE had nearly 100 members, within two years it had well-surpassed the 100-member mark. Today, RISE has 220 member companies — representing 95 percent of the manufacturers, formulators and distributors of specialty pesticides and fertilizers.

"Allen, through his tenure, was able to bring most every industry player into RISE as a member, which I think was a tremendous accomplishment," said Culpepper. "It was a ripe scenario where conflict could have existed but I think Allen's demeanor and the way he approached things and his goal of getting the industry together worked out very well," he said.

RISE brought groups together "across markets, across artificial boundary lines," and "as a result, the industry has gotten stronger," said James, who retired in October 2010 after 20 years leading the association. Aaron Hobbs, current RISE president, joined the organization in 2009.

Over the years, RISE became a respected voice of the industry, working closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal agencies, as well as state and local regulatory bodies. James and Rosenberg even testified together before Congress. "We were successful in that no negative legislation has ever really passed Congress during the 25 years that RISE has existed, that I'm aware of, that would have restricted the development of these products," said James.



RISE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2015 – 2020

A five-year plan that gives clarity to RISE members/volunteers/staff and promotes the continued growth of the association.

MISSION WHAT WE DO

Protect and advance the specialty pest management and health industries by:

- Representing a strong industry voice
- Advocating to shape public policy
- Influencing positive public opinion

VISION OUR IMPACT

An industry free to create inspiring and healthy places where we live, work and play.

AUDIENCE OUR FOCUS

- RISE member companies
 - Federal, state and local public policy makers
 - Regulatory agencies
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Adding Capabilities.

RISE upped its game in 2008 when it made the strategic shift to be more proactive. “You have to realize you’re moving an entire organization with a variety of member companies and a variety of perspectives, and this was going to cost money,” recalled Joshua Weeks, the RISE governing board chair who worked with James to develop the plan and led the two-year transition.

Following significant research, testing and assessments, members were presented the findings and individually told at the association’s annual meeting how adding the new capability would raise their dues. “It’s not often people vote themselves a dues increase, but that’s what they did,” recalled Weeks, an industry consultant who then led Bayer CropScience’s North American professional products division.

“For me, it was a moment,” he said. “It was an overwhelming kind of support and a validation of what RISE means to the people who understand it and

participate in it. They voted with their wallets. It was sort of a turning point in the organization,” Weeks explained.

Led by RISE Public Affairs Vice President Karen Reardon, the proactive component “has been a huge success” and complements the “very good traditional advocacy work that goes on at RISE,” said Weeks.

What’s happened over the last decade is “pretty dramatic,” added Dan Stahl, current governing board chair of RISE and vice president of marketing and business development at OHP Inc. Through focus groups, RISE learned that talk of LD50s and scientific studies “wasn’t resonating with the general public,” he said. It became clear that the public recognized the value of the industry but RISE had to communicate this value differently. “That was a huge shift,” he said.

Bringing “the conversation down to a personal level” like how pesticides control ants in the kitchen and help prevent Lyme disease, has had a big impact, said Culpepper. So has building grassroots support and using social media.

RISE is aiming high for the next 25 years. “We have in place an organization that can deal with issues as well as improve the industry, itself,” said Culpepper.