

Green Options

Greening the Greens: Environmentally Friendly Golf Course Care

By Joe Mohr • June 2, 2008



I've long had a theory that many people enjoy golf because of the picturesque surroundings of the typical golf course. Wooded areas, rolling hills, green grass, lakes and ponds, rivers and creeks, sand...sadly, it is the closest that many people will get to "nature", and the longest chunk of time many are willing to spend outdoors. And although it is beautiful to behold—**the average golf course maintains it's beauty with a high dose of toxic chemicals**—not to mention the enormous consumption of water (approx 18 million gallons per course per year), the clearcutting of woodlands and fields, and the loss of animal sanctuaries.

More and more golfers, hackers, and non-golfers are becoming aware of the environmental damage one golf course can have on its surroundings. In the case of George Prior and his family the article ["Poisoned Fairways"](#) points out how they learned the hardest way:

In August 1982, after a few rounds of golf at the Army Navy Country Club outside Washington, D.C., Navy Lt. George Prior, an athletic, healthy, 30-year-old Navy flight officer, developed an odd rash on his back and began suffering flu-like symptoms. He checked himself into Bethesda Naval Hospital, where his body soon began to burn from the inside out. His internal organs started failing, blisters bubbled on his skin. After slipping into a coma, he died within days. A Navy forensic pathologist concluded that Prior had died as a result of a severe allergic reaction to Daconil 2787, a fungicide that had been sprayed on the course.

Of course, this is an extreme case, but one that can be tracked to its source (mainly because Mr. Prior was in the armed forces and received a detailed autopsy) unlike many other similar, though less violent, cases. However, most chemicals don't have such an immediate effect on the golfer or the environment, but the end result of prolonged exposure may be the same. Golf course pesticides and herbicides have been linked to respiratory problems, serious skin irritations, nausea, and cancer.

Change is on the horizon.

[Neighborhood associations](#) have applied pressure to keep golf courses (and the surrounding neighborhoods) chemical free. Models have joined to help [keep pesticides off the shelves](#). And, [organic golf courses](#) are beginning to pop up.

In my home town of St. Louis, Missouri one company—[Keeper of the Green](#)—is helping golf courses create the same beauty and durability while using environmentally friendly products.