

CBC DOC OFF THE MARK

By Rick Young Created: March 3, 2017



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Last night, on CBC's *The Nature of Things* with David Suzuki, 'Dad and the Dandelions' aired.

Canadian documentary filmmaker, Andrew Nisker, a self-professed environmentalist, created the one-hour episode. In it he seeks to find answers for why his father died of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and, using what I think amounts to the science of a Ouija board, he surmises that there must be a correlation between golf courses, specifically the pesticides used on them, and his father's passing.

"My dad was never exposed to chemicals," Nisker says early in the document " maybe when he played all day on a golf course." <https://scoregolf.com>



(MAGAZINE-SUBSCRIPTION)

I have watched 'Dad and the Dandelions' three times after being sent a media screen version last week. I did so the first time without any preconceived notions, the second and third times while taking notes. From those viewings I can tell you that the filming and editing is done quite well and that Nisker has some genuine talent as a filmmaker.

That's where my plaudits for this documentary end.

Clearly, Nisker had an agenda here. Pesticides are the focus of 'Dad and the Dandelions', which takes an entire industry to task for what Nisker claims is a flippant, careless attitude towards their use. He also portrays the game as elitist and opines that every golf course is manicured to perfection.

Then you have the true villains of this documentary. Although he's careful not to call them out specifically, Nisker portrays golf course superintendents, in my mind a highly skilled, well-trained professional association of men and women across the country, as the overlords of toxic waste sites.

Is that hyperbole? No. "Toxic waste sites" is precisely how one environmental lawyer in 'Dad and the Dandelions' describes golf courses.

What's disturbing beyond the agenda is the leading way Nisker seeks to get viewers on his side. While I am truly apologetic about the passing of Nisker's father, I feel he uses it to connect emotionally with viewers. He also does so by talking to medical, legal and environmental experts but, save for a couple of encounters, he avoids people who have opinions or expertise that can refute his theory. A 44-minute run time allows a number of questions to be asked, but less than 45 seconds of Nisker's piece was devoted to what I'd call balance. Therefore, non-golfers who chose to watch will almost assuredly paint golf with a negative brush.

Here are several other issues I have with Nisker's documentary:

*Other than one 20-second clip featuring J. Rhett Evans, the president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, no other active member of that association or the Canadian Golf Course Superintendents Association (CGCSA) appeared in this film.

*Absolutely no empirical data was provided with respect to frequency of pesticide use on golf courses. This, in my opinion, leads viewers into believing this is a common, every week or even everyday practice used to keep courses green and weed free. It's not. Pesticides are a last resort.

*Twice in the film Nisker's claims against pesticides and his father's death were somewhat refuted by experts, Frank Rossi, a turfgrass specialist from Cornell University (no one from the University of Guelph was consulted for comment) and Aaron Blair, a senior epidemiologist with the National Cancer Institute. Said Blair: "This is a single case. You have to be careful on a single case. Why your father got the disease who knows?"

*Nowhere in the film was there any mention of ongoing preventative measures against weeds on golf courses. This includes annual, or even twice yearly, aeration and over-seeding to thicken grass naturally.

*Nowhere in the film was there any mention of spot spraying, another common practice at golf courses to reduce pesticide and fungicide use.

*Touring professionals, who spend upwards of eight hours a day, six days a week, up to 40 weeks a year on these apparent toxic waste sites, have not reported any spikes in incidents of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma.

*Club professionals/teaching professionals who spend up to 80 hours a week at the golf course have not voiced concerns. As PGA of America CEO Pete Bevacqua mentioned in the documentary, “Nothing has come to our attention, and if there was any real risk to playing golf it would be news to us and would come to our attention through our membership.”

*Nisker called the annual Golf Industry Show a “trade show for pesticides.” It is if that’s all you want on camera. The annual trade show sponsored by the GCSAA and National Golf Course Owners Association of America, is, in fact, a show dedicated to products and services in turf and facility care. That being said, take note on the array of greens mowers, golf carts and equipment carts Nisker walks alongside.

*At one point Nisker went to an open public meeting on pesticides being used on golf courses locally. He’s the only one who showed up. That prompts him to question why “no one seems to want to talk about golf courses and pesticides.” Two issues: First, he makes it appear people are apathetic instead of trusting in the methodology greens superintendents and golf courses use. Second, he’s evasive again in speaking with any member of the CGCSA.

*Meg Sears, an environmental scientist, is quoted in the film saying, “Golf courses are much more intense users of pesticides than farmers.” According to CGCSA facts and findings, approximately one per cent of pesticides sold in Canada are used at golf facilities. Take a guess where the largest percentage is used.

*The subject of wildlife is also carefully avoided in the documentary, this despite nearly 100 golf courses in Canada being designated Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries by Audubon International with more than 150 more in the application process. Also not mentioned are facilities setting up nests and homes for birds and bats to naturally keep the insect population in check. By the way, another thing common at Canadian golf courses right now: bee hives. Think about that for a second: Golf courses providing sanctuaries for a declining bee population.

*This particular point I’m sorry to bring up. Unintentional or simply missed by Nisker, he mentioned in his ‘Dad and the Dandelions’ monologue how golfers “lick their golf balls”. Showing his late father chewing a golf tee near the documentary’s conclusion probably wasn’t the best choice for a final shot.

I reached out to Nisker requesting an interview several times but he never responded. That’s odd because, according to his Twitter timeline, he did 23 interviews Thursday. Not a single golf-based magazine, golf writer or golf broadcaster, of course, was mentioned on the timeline. He did, however, re-tweet a couple of posts from my

Twitter account on Tuesday about the show, carefully avoiding the one about golf course superintendents being the overlords of toxic waste sites. This suggests to me Nisker is quite adept at one thing: self-promotion.

It's troubling the CBC and Suzuki has given Nisker this forum but they have and nothing can be done about that.

What is good to hear is the golf industry is apparently ready with a response. This according to the CGCSA and the National Allied Golf Association, of which the CGCSA is a member. How that will be done is not yet known but the fact the industry is standing firm and united and will do so on this matter speaks volumes.

Personally, I'd like the *Nature of Things* to offer up equal time to the golf industry. That won't happen of course. If it did the national network, Suzuki and Nisker would find out in no uncertain terms that golf courses are far from toxic waste sites, that golf courses are mostly environmentally friendly green spaces, ideal for humans and wildlife, and that golf course superintendents are some of the world's finest land stewards.

One more thing they would find out: 'Dad and the Dandelions' was a poorly conceived program from the start.

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RICK YOUNG

EQUIP AND BIZ

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Join Rick Young for what's new and what's happening in the world of golf equipment and business.

jim moore March 3, 2017 at 12:28 pm

Please forward your story to the Ontario Premieres Office before she shuts down all golf courses in Ontario.

[Reply](#)

Mr. America March 6, 2017 at 3:19 pm

As Donald Trump would say, "This is fake news!" but then again he owns many golf courses...perhaps he's working with Russian pesticide companies to cover the truths about his courses!!!!

[Reply](#)

Mike McLaughlin March 3, 2017 at 3:50 pm

I too watched the documentary last night but I always find that Mr Suzuki tends to gravitate towards the negative of the environment. Last night's show left a lot of unanswered questions and I do hope the golf industry does have the opportunity to respond, but I somewhat doubt it. CBC is publicly funded and by presenting such bias they are able to maintain their viewing numbers in order to continue receiving public funds.

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Angela Cunningham March 4, 2017 at 3:09 am

I was very disappointed in the documentary in how this topic was presented, however, it was not unexpected. It seems that when these type of "hot button" issues are discussed with such a lack of representation of the FACTS from all sides it inevitably gives science yet another 'black eye' resulting in a general distrust by those who are not aware of what good science really is. It is unfortunate and frustrating that an industry as large as the golf industry can be so negatively affected by documentaries such as this one. People in general are not objective when it comes to such topics and are more than willing to believe without hesitation the information given in shows like these. Shows that do not provide the viewer with a more balanced approach to topics are no better than newspaper tabloids. Give people the opportunity to become more educated on topics and then let them decide where they stand.

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WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE March 5, 2017 at 3:04 am

WHY IS DAVID SUZUKI ATTACKING THE GOLF INDUSTRY ?!?! Pesticides on golf courses may cause cancer ?!?! Really ?!?! Under the false-pretext of stopping cancer, golf businesses are being attacked by Suzuki. Suzuki's latest anti-golf campaign, in the form of a documentary on CBC's The Nature of Things, falsely-implies that cancer occurs because pesticides are used on golf courses. In fact, Suzuki has found ONLY ONE person who MAY have been afflicted. However, photos of this person clearly show him as being bloated, fat, pale, stressed, and totally out-of-shape — the perfect candidate for cancer. Does Suzuki's documentary present ANY evidence of harm because of golf ?!?! NO ! Do golf courses cause cancer ?!?! NO ! Is golf making people sick ?!?! NO ! In fact, there is NOT ONE KNOWN ILLNESS from the proper use of pest control products used on ANY golf facility. In essence, Suzuki HAS NOTHING ! Sadly, this kind of reckless campaign by Suzuki will inevitably lead to terrorized & destroyed golf businesses, lost jobs and hardship for golf employees, and weakened communities. Pest control products DO NOT cause cancer ! Suzuki has NO REAL evidence, just FAKE-NEWS intended to harm the golf industry. Health Canada, and NOT Suzuki, has the essential expertise on the subject of pest control products used by the golf industry. Even Canadian Cancer Society has STATED REPEATEDLY that scientific research does NOT provide a conclusive link between pest control products and cancer. Suzuki and his fanatical-operatives must get off the grASS of the golf industry ! <http://pesticidetruths.com/> (<http://pesticidetruths.com/>) WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE AND NORAH G ✓ — David Suzuki — Pesticides On Golf Course May Cause Cancer — The Nature Of Things — BLOG <http://pesticidetruths.com/2017/03/04/david-suzuki-attack-against-the-golf-industry-cbc-documentary-pesticides-on-golf-course-may-cause-cancer-2017-03-11/> (<http://pesticidetruths.com/2017/03/04/david-suzuki-attack-against-the-golf-industry-cbc-documentary-pesticides-on-golf-course-may-cause-cancer-2017-03-11/>)

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B P March 7, 2017 at 7:46 am

As with most “The Nature of Things” we see pseudo-science all over this thing. Nisker is just taking a page out of Suzuki’s play book and trying to make a fortune out of leaps in logic. I guess it proves one thing... you shouldn’t lick your “golf” balls.

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H March 8, 2017 at 9:46 pm

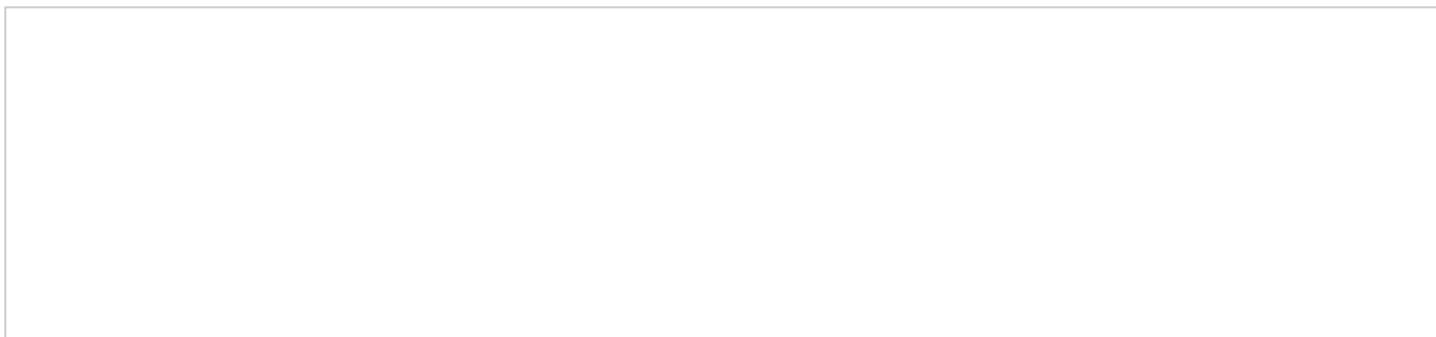
What I found most shocking was the complete lack of balance in this documentary. One of the most ridiculous scenes was of the “organic” golf course using vinegar and dish soap on weeds. From my understanding these items are MORE toxic than pesticides and herbicides. The only reason why people thinks it’s ok is because they are common items that people understand. People have a fear of what they don’t understand and a deep mistrust of the corporate agenda. Documentaries like this perpetuate that fear.

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A Day At The Don

It's always special to end the season playing golf at your childhood course. For me, it's Toronto muni Don Valley.



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