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Turf Care: Pesticides and Bill 64

By David McPherson (September 2008)

Golf courses are filled with pests: weeds, diseases and insects — many of which are unseen to the weekend duffer. These pests threaten the health of the turf; it's the superintendents' job to combat these intruders and keep the grass green. Combating these uninvited guests requires a combination of treatments and good course management, including the responsible use of pesticides.

Retired superintendent Gordon Witteveen, who has written several books on keeping the greens, says most superintendents apply pesticides sparingly and only as a last resort.

With the recent passing of Bill 64 in Ontario, "an Act to amend the Pesticides Act to prohibit the use and sale of pesticides that may be used for cosmetic purposes," superintendents' ability to use these treatments - even sparingly - and the average golfer's enjoyment of a "green experience" may be compromised in the future.

"The lushness of golf courses will have to be replaced with a browner and leaner version as water and the use of inputs is slowly legislated down," says architect Ian Andrew.

Golf industry leaders have been tirelessly working behind-the-scenes meeting with government officials from the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) to ensure this "browning" of golf does not happen. Until now, a patchwork of municipal bylaws has governed the use of pesticides in the province with some municipalities banning them outright and others allowing their use with exceptions. Bill 64 provides a more level playing field; golf is considered exempt from the outright ban, with exceptions, along with forestry and agriculture.

The Ontario Allied Golf Association (OAGA)

Teri Yamada, Managing Director, Communications and Government Relations for the RCGA, was instrumental in creating a group called the Ontario Allied Golf Association (OAGA) to lobby government. Before Bill 64 received Royal Assent on June 18, 2008, the OAGA helped gather 1,316 signatures, which were submitted to the MOE in support of exceptions for golf courses.

"Canada was the first country to introduce environmental guidelines for golf courses in 1993," says Yamada.

And, through the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program (see www.ontarioipm.com) implemented in 2003, and the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary program, golf continues to be green leaders.

Working with Yamada on the OAGA is Jarrod Barakett, superintendent from Deer Ridge Golf Club in Kitchener and Ontario Director of the CGSA and Government Relations Director of the OGSA; Ken Cousineau, Executive Director of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association; and Vince Kishimoto, Regional Director, Central Ontario chapter, of the National Golf Course Owners Association Canada.

The golf industry feared that part of the regulations of Bill 64 would include a mandated reduction plan for pesticides. After the OAGA met with the minister of the environment and his staff in early July, they were assured this would not be part of the regulations.

Barakett says the responsible use of pesticides is essential for courses to survive.

"Without pesticides, the average golfer would have to get used to lower green speeds due to higher cuts, an unmanicured look and diseases reeking havoc on all playing surfaces," he comments. "There would also be a real possibility every spring that you are not going to have a golf course because snow mold will likely destroy the property and other diseases such as Pythium could wipe out your greens, tees and fairways in a matter of hours in the middle of summer..

"Management styles would have to be changed to alleviate stress on all putting surfaces. You would be going back to the 1950s when greens were cut at a quarter of an inch. That's what people would have to live with ... green speeds of six versus 10, 10.5 or 11. This would result in Ontario never again hosting a PGA or LPGA event due to its inability to provide a product similar to the rest of the world."

Keith Bartlett, head superintendent at St. George's Golf and Country Club, believes golf courses are way ahead of the lawn-care industry in how they apply pesticides.

"You cannot kill every weed on the golf course," he says. "I am always trying to find ways to tweak my fertility program or other maintenance programs to reduce pesticide use and its associated costs."

Yamada agrees. She says comparing golf course maintenance to maintaining your lawn is not a fair comparison.

"You can walk across your neighbour's lawn, but you can't just walk across a golf course ... you have to pay a green fee, so it's controlled access," she says. "Because of existing laws in Ontario, anytime you apply a pesticide you have to post a sign at the front gate and at the first and 10th tee information not only what the product is, but also contact information, so it is informed consent."

The OAGA will continue to work to educate government about the IPM program and ensure pesticides are not overused by their members, but they are still available when needed.

"If golfers want to continue to enjoy the level of conditioning they've got used to, we cannot eliminate pesticide use completely and the government understands that," she concludes. "We need to continue to prove to the government we are responsible users and are a proactive industry."

[More articles by David McPherson](#)

Featured Courses



Fairmont Turnberry Isle

The mist from the waterfall framing the island green on the 18th hole often produces a rainbow, adding insult to injury on this tough Florida course.



Woodington Lake Golf Club

The new course at Woodington Lake sprawls across miles of rolling, fescue covered hills and challenges golfers with immense waste bunkers and lots of water.



Dragon's Fire Golf Club

The latest addition to golf in the west end of the GTA is cut out of a former tree nursery giving Dragon's Fire the appearance of being there for many years.



Piper's Heath Golf Club

Noted Canadian architect Graham Cooke has crafted an award winning heathlands course complete with pot bunkers and ancient oaks, right in the heart of Halton Region.

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