

Pesticides And Golf: The Times, They Are A'Changin

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Starting in the Spring of 2009, the province of Ontario will enact a ban on all pesticides used for cosmetic reasons in the urban landscape. For now, golf courses and farms are exempted from this wide sweeping ban.

It can be safely assumed, however, that within the next few years all provinces will adopt similar legislation and the turfgrass industry will be forced to adapt to some new rules of engagement... or at the least, application.

While, as of March, 2009, it is business as usual for golf courses in British Columbia, on the pesticide front, a battle looms in the not to distant future.

It is likely that soon legislators will be moving to enact pesticide bans in cities and towns throughout the province.

In these tough economic times, however, it is also important for them to recognize our industry's value and to step up and protect a golf industry that contributes billions to the economy.

With a full pesticide ban in our province, it would not take long to realize the economic impact of golf courses closing because turf has died, from disease or insect infestation, simply because Superintendents could not apply the medicines they once could.

In one town in Ontario, they have taken a different approach to tackle this thorny issue.

In 2006 the township of Uxbridge Ontario, passed a policy stating that all golf courses within the town must be fully Audubon Certified by 2015, or within 10 years of opening their doors.

What does "Audobon Certified" mean?

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses is a program where maintenance departments at golf facilities can join, and by successfully completing 6 categories, become certified as environmental sanctuaries.



These categories are: Environmental Planning, Wildlife and Habitat Management, Water Quality, Water Conservation, Chemical Use Reduction and Safety, and Outreach and Education.

While this may seem like a monumental task, most golf courses are probably closer to certification than they realize.

Categories such as "Chemical Use Reduction and Safety" are a given in any maintenance shop due to the extremely high costs of utilizing these products and the dangers of working with them without the proper safety precautions.

Don't get me wrong, attaining certification in any category can be an arduous task, primarily when it comes to documenting a courses environmental initiatives.

However, the time has come for golf course owners and Superintendents to prove that these beautiful green spaces are truly sanctuaries for wildlife and people to inhabit and enjoy.

I believe that Uxbridge has got it right by legislating that golf courses must prove that they are stewards of the environment.

There are those who are not in favour of this for any number of reasons.

For example there are many Superintendents and golf course owners who believe that Audubon certification costs a considerable amount of money, but this is not necessarily the case.

One insurance company, Signature Risk (www.signaturerisk.com) is offering 10% credits on insurance premiums to any course that becomes Audubon certified.

This type of financial reward will have the cost of certification paid off very quickly.

Combine this with the reduction of inputs to maintain an Audubon certified golf course and the savings over the years will be substantial.

The bottom line is that golf course Superintendents are extremely hard working individuals who should be recognized as stewards of the land and be considered environmental heroes, not villains.

And if we don't believe that these changes are coming, we are kidding ourselves.

Golf course properties have the potential for great biodiversity and through Audubon, the true image of the golf industry can be realized.

And with the imminent threat of a full pesticide ban on the horizon, it is time that golf courses and municipalities take the "bull by the horns" and set out to prove once and for all that our prized recreational properties truly benefit local economies and the environment.

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