

Golf courses and the environment

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The use of pesticides, the impact on water and soil quality, and irrigation water usage are often cited as public concerns about the golf industry. GCSAA is leading the golf community in working to correct public misconceptions through a comprehensive effort combining research, education and communication. These inaccuracies, if not corrected, could pose a serious threat to the vitality and integrity of the game of golf.

Sound environmental practices are implemented on golf courses.

University and government studies indicate that, when properly applied, pesticides and fertilizers do not leach into groundwater in any appreciable amounts.

Modern turfgrass management practices greatly reduce the potential for leaching or runoff into water supplies.

Pesticides and fertilizers are used only on certain portions of the golf course. The rest of the property often consists of natural areas not maintained with turf care products. These areas can provide a home for wildlife and include a diverse variety of native plants and trees.

Golf course superintendents are among the best-educated and most conscientious users of chemical management tools. Today, most superintendents have two- or four-year university degrees in agronomy, horticulture or other related fields.

Many superintendents enter the profession because of a love of nature and the outdoors, and are strongly committed to conservation. A recent survey shows superintendents give extremely high priority to maintenance practices that do not have a negative impact on the environment.

Most golf courses compost grass clippings and leaves, which reduces the amount of waste in landfills. Composting is a growing and recommended practice for golf course operations.

Turf-related benefits of golf courses

The water used on golf courses can be an excellent investment in both economic and environmental terms. Irrigated golf courses generate millions of tourist and property tax dollars for state economies. Many courses now use recycled water as part of their irrigation practices.

When effectively irrigated, healthy turf provides numerous environmental benefits. Properly maintained turfgrass:

Produces oxygen (carbon dioxide exchange) and cools the atmosphere

- Prevents soil erosion
- Filters natural and synthetic contaminants from rainfall and irrigation
- Recharges critical groundwater supplies
- Provides crucial "greenspace" in urban settings

As a result of computerized irrigation systems and improved turfgrass varieties, courses can now use less water more efficiently to achieve the same level of conditioning. Continuing research will provide even more low-water turfgrass varieties in the future.

Ecological and community benefits of golf courses

In addition to turf-related benefits, courses provide other important ecological and community assets. Golf courses are:

Key sanctuaries for birds and other wildlife

Disposal and treatment sites for (effluent) wastewater

Attractive and environmentally sound "covers" for closed landfills and other ecologically damaged sites

Recreational places for nongolf activities, such as jogging, walking and bird-watching

Businesses that provide hundreds of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled jobs

Places for social interaction and community events

Civic benefactors that give major contributions to charities

Community improvements that add value to land, thus increasing local tax bases

Wetlands preservation areas

Moving ahead

On golf's behalf, GCSAA has built strong and cooperative relationships with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other major regulatory groups. Through governmental affairs, professional education and public information, the association strives to make environmental responsibility a basic precept for its members.

The golf community has the willingness, the resources and the motivation to address the environmental issues that exist on the golf courses of today. It is hoped that through these efforts golf will be perceived as a model environmental industry for the 1990s and beyond.