

## Un incendie nous a fait prendre conscience

*By Paulo Roberge*

On July 9, 1993 we had a fire that made us think of the consequences poorly stored pesticides can have on the natural environment, especially the potential financial liability against my club.

Our pesticide storage area was approximately 10 metres from the Nicolet River. Among the contents, were 2 x 25 litre oil drums, fertilizer and some pesticides (including 200 L of PMAS - a mercury based pesticide). Adjacent to the storage building were 2 x 500 gallon fuel tanks, one contained unleaded gasoline, the other - diesel. The hoses passed through the wall of the storage building (to deter gasoline theft).

On the morning of the fire, an employee entered the storage building to fill up the sand pro, when suddenly the machine caught with flames. The fire then propagated to the building, then the hoses and finally the two fuel tanks. What a fire.

When the firemen arrived - the storage building had collapsed, but due to the fuel tanks the fire grew larger. They started pouring water on the other garage that caught fire, the two tanks and the remaining of the collapsed storage building. It was obvious that the water they were pouring on the fire was going into the river and if they were to continue - it would take pesticides along with it into the river. After explaining the toxicity of the contents stored to the fireman in charge, he opted to stop applying water on the pesticide storage building. Together we decided to use the front-end loader to create a dam with sand (between the storage area - and the fire).

Environmental authorities later arrived and luckily verified that the river was unharmed. The fuel all burned away and the pesticides leached into the ground, beneath the storage building causing a 5 month decontamination period that was extremely expensive. That was an eye-opening.

After that ordeal, we did some research and decided to build a safe place for our pesticides and gas tanks. The first thing we had to resolve was the short distance between the river and the storage facility. We found out that the minimum distance for pesticide/fuel storage was 60 m from the river since it is classified a sensitive area by our municipality, therefore we had to create a new separate building. We think today it should always be this way, so don't let a catastrophe occur before you act.

After an appropriate location was chosen, we had the soil excavated, added sand (compacted), and built a concrete slab with sides high enough to contain whatever was stored in it, should a leak occur (i.e. a spill containment berm). After that, we had the floor painted with epoxy to seal the concrete. Construction materials include non-absorbent, non-flammable materials. So our research brought us to have a pesticide and fuel storage building that has:

1. sealed flooring with a catch-basin to facilitate leaked product (if any);
2. locked door;
3. adequate ventilation;
4. adequate lighting;
5. independent shelves with pour-out tubes that are connected to the floor not the wall;
6. no contamination from the outside;
7. warning signs to let the public know of the storage contents.

If we had to do it all over again, it would be as it is now - or maybe we would even separate the fuel tanks from the pesticide storage area altogether. Be sure of your installations because insurance does not cover damage and contamination costs, which could easily be in excess of a golf course's payment capacity.

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