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Imprelis Story Continues with Answers, And Some Questions

Hoosier Lawn Care Operators, golf courses, and suppliers are now well into the third month of the unfolding story of Imprelis herbicide. In that time, we have learned of significant damage caused to conifers, not only in Indiana, but in as many as 21 other states. We do know that the damage to such trees was severe. We know that the damage was caused, in most cases, by only one low-rate application of the herbicide to the turf grass surrounding those trees. We know that reaction in Indiana was swift and certainly in the best interests of those affected. The Office of Indiana State Chemist literally dropped everything they were doing in order to respond to complaints and questions regarding the use of Imprelis. We know that their investigators spent week after week following thru on such complaints to end up documenting that the damage was not caused by the applicator; but by a mis-branded product. We know that the Purdue Plant & Pest Diagnostic Lab worked tirelessly to process sample after sample to document that affected plants had not been damaged by disease or insect infestation. We know that Purdue Extension made great efforts to keep the industry informed as to what was happening, and what we were learning about the unfolding event.

We also now know that DuPont has taken full responsibility for what happened and has initiated a program to recall any product still in the field. We know that the EPA and the Indiana State Chemist have stopped sale, use, or distribution of Imprelis. We also know that the manufacturer has begun a claims processing program, with guidelines, so that affected property owners can be made whole as a result of damaged caused. All this we know and have learned in about 110 days since early June. The learning curve has been steep.

However, what we don't know may soon replace the impact of what we do know about Imprelis damage, and what is being done to correct it. The bigger, long term question is WHY? Why did certain varieties of trees react so strongly to one application of a turf grass herbicide? What did, or did not happen in the development and testing of Imprelis which may have prevented this disaster? Did someone not do their homework? Did someone else not properly grade their papers? Was research not thorough enough, or in depth enough, to catch the fact that this product was highly toxic to certain trees at very low rates and after only one application?

If a pesticide is labeled for use on turf grass, is the manufacturer not required to test its potential impact on other non-target plants which are indigenous to such areas as a residential lawn or a golf course? Would not such plants as evergreen trees fall into that category?

From talking to friends in the manufacturing sector, and from reading all that was published about Imprelis before its introduction—we've learned that an enormous amount of money goes into the development of such products before they even get close to registration. DuPont conducted over 400 independent field trials and university tests since 2006 on Imprelis. People in high place signed off on its quality, safety, and effectiveness. It was then registered for sale by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2010, heavily marketed to the industry in the winter of 2011, sold as fast as it could be produced this spring; and away we went.

The cost of Imprelis will be more than the damage done to literally thousands of trees. Whether you used Imprelis or not; this incident will take a toll on our believability and on the confidence our customers have in what we bring to their property when treating their lawn. We are going to be explaining ourselves for a long, long time. And rightly so.

Thus let us be clear. The story of Imprelis is long from over. We owe it ourselves, our customers, and the future of our industry to not rest until we look at the system of product development, testing, and registration; in order to find any weaknesses in that process, and then fix them to the best of our ability. If we do so, then we can again be more accepting of new products and perhaps the story of Imprelis will have a productive ending.

Bob Andrews
Executive Director

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