

The State of the State on Weeds: The AG Industry Perspective It's Time to Fight Back Against Environmentalists' Untruths

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If you believe that it is important for your business to remain profitable and viable in the wake of a continuous barrage of bad publicity - often whipped up by overzealous environmental groups promoting their own agendas and quoting "bad science" to support their claims - then the answer can be found here.

For too many years now environmentalists have been dominating the media with their anti-business messaging that has resulted in a series of what many call frivolous lawsuits in attempts to delay, block or outright ban the use of products that make homes and business safe from disease and pests.

One need only point to the fairly recent citizen uproar involving the aerial pheromone spraying of the light brown apple moth over Santa Cruz and Monterey counties in California to understand how the ill-informed public, local politicians and environmental groups can short-circuit efforts to protect our food source from insect invaders. Even though the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California agricultural officials assured anxious residents that pheromone aerial applications posed no safety concerns and was the most effective way of eliminating the invasive pest, the frenzy whipped up by the media and community action groups killed the aerial spraying campaign.

The light brown apple moth known to feed on hundreds of different plants, was first detected in 2007 and has since been found in 18 California counties which have been under quarantine - which requires counties to have crops including nursery stock, regularly inspected and follow strict procedures before their crops can be moved into or out of the quarantined zones.

Let's consider a world without pesticides, a reality that many green groups have as their end objective. Simply put, that would mean allowing crop-damaging diseases, insect infestations and noxious weeds to decimate the human food supply chain and drive grocery prices through the roof; it would allow vector-borne illnesses caused by rats and mosquitoes, such as encephalitis and West Nile virus, and Lyme disease caused by ticks, to run rampant; and cockroaches and mold/mildew would penetrate uncontrollably into such areas as our homes, restrooms, school cafeterias and elsewhere, spreading known allergens that cause asthma and other diseases.

Let's take it a step further: other insects and plant pests, such as poison ivy, fire ants, spiders, lice, bedbugs and termites, now effectively controlled by pesticides, would be free to wreak havoc on humans and their dwellings. And let's don't forget that poor Fido would be left on his own to scratch away platoons of invading fleas.

Yet, it seems like almost daily there are media reports highlighting the dangers of pesticides, which fruits and vegetables are more safe to consume, new demands for wider and wider buffer zones from residential and business neighborhoods, and this survey and that study pointing out yet new risks and dangers from working or living in and around these products. More often than not, much of this information is "misinformation," passed along and circulated by environmental groups who have their own agendas and fund-raising demands to fulfill.

For instance, between 2000 and 2009, three tax-exempt, nonprofit environmental groups - Western Watersheds Project, Forest Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity - filed more than 700 cases against the federal government. Between 2003 and 2007 the federal government paid more than \$4.7 billion in taxpayer money to environmental firms; and that's a conservative estimate. In one 15-month-long case the Earthjustice Legal Foundation and the Western Environmental Law Center filed for \$479,242 in attorney fees. Insult to injury, consider this: the president of the Environmental Defense Fund rakes in an annual \$446,072 in salary; in second place for salary is the \$439,327 paid to the president of the World Wildlife Fund.

What can you do about it? Well, since public opinion frequently makes its way into the halls of your local elected officials, you can counter the claims of these environmental groups by making your viewpoints heard by attending sessions with your government representatives. The more industry participation we have during these sessions the greater our strength in showing that industry is serious and devoted to enlightening elected representatives about the many benefits available when using sound pest prevention and eradication practices. These benefits obviously enhance and improve environmental safety and public health, and practicing these methods can help dispel the many myths that place our industry in a negative light.

You can help make a difference. Your voice does matter. If we don't do something now, we will continue to be frustrated by the faulty and distorted stories being circulated by those wishing our industry ill. Make up your mind today to take a stand and get involved for the good of our businesses, our industry and for the world's growing population.

What You Can Do To Get Involved

- Write a Letter to the Editor and set the record straight whenever a news item places your business and industry in a bad light.
- Belong to an industry association and make sure it has an active legislative program that fights bad bills and regulations, and provides members with information on these issues.
- Participate in your association's legislative events, whether they are Capitol legislative days or district events.
- Ask your association to arrange group in-district visits with your legislator where you and your peers can make your presence felt.
- Monitor legislative bills that can damage your business interests and let your representatives know of the many flaws, and vote accordingly.
- Contact environmental groups directly and let them know the flaws in a press release or Web site posting if the science is distorted or untruthful.