

RECORD ATTENDANCE AT AMENITY FORUM CONFERENCE

This year's annual conference of the Amenity Forum attracted some 180 delegates. The event was held at Leicester City Football Club. The attendance demonstrated the strong commitment by those in the amenity sector to promoting best practice in weed, pest and disease control. The event also had stands from some 18 organisations which delegates were able to visit during breaks and at lunchtime.

The Forum very much valued the support of these organisations which made the event possible.

FORUM PARTNERS



Professor John Moverley, Independent Chairman of the Amenity Forum, chaired the sessions and made a concluding presentation (see later). The following provides a brief summary of the speakers and their topics together with other information about the day. Copies of all the power point presentations can be found on the Amenity Forum website

JOHN MOVERLEY CHAIRMAN OF THE AMENITY FORUM

<http://www.amenityforum.co.uk/conference.htm> and a short video clip to provide a flavour of the day can be found at www.afconference.co.uk/video/

OPENING PANEL SESSION ON POLICY ISSUES



Adrian Dixon, Head of the Policy & Implementation team at the Chemicals Regulations Directorate, reminded members of the main policy changes following implementation of the Sustainable Use Directive. He also emphasised the National Action Plan for implementation of the change.

This identifies three key priorities as being:

- Protection of water
- Standards of practice in amenity and amateur use
- Development of a greater range of viable control techniques for adoption by users

He stated that all involved needed to pay due attention to factors such as ensuring adequate training, proper monitoring and testing of equipment, fully considering integrated solutions, thorough product choice, proper storage and handling and mitigate risks to water.

He described the important role of the Amenity forum in producing best practice guidances and by all involved supporting the Forum demonstrating the sector's commitment to driving up standards. He recognised that there is much good practice in the sector but pointed out that there were still gaps 'there is inconsistency and it is important that we continue to work on this'.

Answering a question, Adrian confirmed that new Codes of Practice were to be developed. The Amenity Forum will be fully involved in assisting in this process as appropriate.



Jo Kennedy, a senior adviser at the Environment Agency, focussed her presentation on water issues. The Water Framework Directive sets out objectives for water protection and determines our priorities for action on pesticides. She stated that the biggest problem that we have with pesticides is their impact on drinking water catchments. She informed the

conference of a Defra Strategy to address water pollution from the urban environment as well as some the reasons for current challenges. She emphasises the importance of the amenity sector in maintaining best practice standards to protect water quality. She also referred to an ongoing consultation on water issues with which the Amenity Forum is fully involved. She supported an integrated approach of all involved to meeting the challenges.



Nick von Westenholz, Chief Executive of the Crop Protection Association, gave his personal impression of recent changes and how they impacted both in terms of public opinion and political views. He looked at the global challenge of food production and those of increasing regulatory control. He stressed that the answer lay in demonstrating that we do act responsibly and operate best practice, that we communicate clearly, that we work together involving all sides of the debate and we maintain a dialogue with policy makers. All this is key to the way that the Amenity Forum operates in its sector. Above all we needed to maintain credibility. He emphasised the importance of raising public awareness as to why we used pesticides and their benefits.



INVASIVE WEEDS – HOW DO WE CONTROL THEM?



David Layland, Managing Director of Japanese Weed Control, addressed the topic. He referenced the publicity around this growing issue and the scare stories. The facts are however that it is an expensive problem and he referenced the following:

- £1.7 Billion spent every year on controlling invasive species within UK (Defra 2010)
- £70 Million on the Olympic site alone (RHS Estimate)

- €19.1 Billion per year in Europe (The Institute of European Environmental Policy 2009)

How do we control it? Well he suggested that we all need to have awareness and recognition of the problem and address through integrated management plans specific to infested sites. He then set out what he saw as a proactive approach to invasive management. There are new techniques coming available but addressing the issue is not cheap. He urged all using contractors to ensure that the latter were fully trained and adopted Amenity Assured standards. There are no short cuts to effective solutions.

CONTROLLING WEEDS, PESTS & DISEASES IN TREES & WOODLANDS



Joan Webber is a senior researcher at the Forestry Commission. As such, she has been very much at the centre of recent issues of tree disease. She provided delegates with a fascinating insight into current research on potential solutions as well as highlighting the extent of the problem and how it impacts on the amenity sector. Especially covered in her presentation was horse chestnut bleeding canker, acute oak decline, ash die back, horse chestnut leaf miner and oak processionary moth. She described the symptoms and impact especially in amenity situations. She emphasised that everyone could help by reporting when they saw disease and referred to an APP which could be used.

Trees serve an invaluable community role not least in promoting well being and their environmental benefits.

SPRAYER TESTING – Getting to grips with new requirements



Duncan Russell, Services manager at the Agricultural Engineering Association, brought delegates up to date with the National Sprayer Test Scheme and how it operates. He highlighted some of the key issues discovered when testing amenity sprayer equipment, not just a safety issue, but also reduces performance and efficiency of operations. He highlighted the implications of the Sustainable Use Directive drawing in more equipment required to be tested. Full guidance on this is available at the Amenity forum website. He stressed the importance of properly tested and inspected spraying equipment in the

amenity sector where proximity to the public was greater. There was still too little uptake of regular sprayer testing in amenity which was costing the sector greatly



BREAK OUT SESSION – WHAT ARE THE CURRENT KEY CHALLENGES & THE IMPLICATIONS?



A break out session allowed smaller groups of delegates to consider what they had heard and determine their views on the key challenges to the sector and the implications for all involved. Each table produced their top three points. These are to be fully analysed by the Forum and used in future planning of activity.

UPDATE ON THE THANET PROJECT – keeping streets & pavements clean and an investigation into integrated approaches for control



Dr Michelle Fountain is Project Leader based at the East Malling Research Station. This project has sought to identify the effectiveness of integrated approaches in areas of Thanet in Kent. It is taking place over a number of years. The scientifically based project seeks to

- Develop new weed control specs., test effectiveness of no herbicide and integrated weed management
- Measure weed growth and identify weed species
- Determine herbicide losses to the wider environment

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- Economic and environmental cost benefit analysis
- Develop and demonstrate guidelines for no chemical control/integrated control
- Obtain feedback from stakeholders

She indicated that results to date show that non pesticide approaches can be effective but they still needed to fully evaluate the cost implications and environmental benefits or otherwise. There are to be a couple of workshops early in the New Year to allow practitioners to have input into the work and help produce guidance. She was keen to work closely with the Amenity Forum in this and indeed the Chairman of the Amenity Forum has agreed to chair these two workshops.

The workshop dates are:

11th February 2014 at the University of Hertfordshire;

25 February 2014 at Lancaster House Hotel, University of Lancaster.

The challenge of managing the Leicester City Football pitches and facilities



Ed Mowe was the npower Groundsman of the year for Championship Clubs in 2013, an award well deserved. Ed spoke to groups of conference delegates pitchside. He provided a fascinating insight into the standards required and some of the challenges faced meeting the demands of busy fixture lists and climate whilst maintaining the playing pitch and practice grounds at the required high standards. He made particular mention of Fusarium as a regular disease challenge.

PANEL PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION

Meeting the needs of golf greenkeepers



JOHN MOVERLEY CHAIRMAN OF THE AMENITY FORUM

Jim Croxton, CEO of BIGGA, provided an insight into the varied activities of BIGGA. He stressed the importance of the very highest standards of greenkeeping and the substantial economic impact of golf in all its forms. Indeed a recent independent report for the UK golf industry indicated the following key statistics:

- 4.2m golfers
- 2,604 Golf Clubs
- £5.2bn Economic Impact
- 79,000 Jobs

He made particular mention of working with the Amenity forum in the production of best practice guidance specifically geared towards the golf sector. He hoped that this could be extended into Europe.

Specifying weed & pest control programmes



Chris Jones is Team Leader for Parks & Open Spaces at Telford & Wrekin Council. He gave what he saw as a 'Parkie's' view of some current questions including:

- Is there really joined up thinking in Government?
- Does the god of block paving reside in all new housing estates!!

He emphasised the extent of financial cuts in local authority budgets and their impact, balanced against the need to maintain standards and respond to regulatory pressures. He explained the approach of Telford & Wrekin to the challenge emphasising some difficult decisions had been taken. This had included the removal of many shrub beds and their replacement with more easily maintained areas.

The Challenges of weed and pest control in water sensitive areas



Dr. Jodie Whitehead from Severn Trent gave a water company perspective on these challenges. Her presentation was divided up as follows:

- What is a sensitive water area?
- As a water company, what pesticide challenges do we see
- What have we been doing to reduce these challenges
- Working in urban catchments – our Big Water Plan

She stressed how much they were now seeking to work in partnership and used work with Network Rail as an example. A key item in her presentation was the urban challenge. She described their Big water Plan described as a new holistic approach working with all partners to meet the challenges together.

A view from the IOG



Geoff Webb, Chief Executive of IOG, reminded delegates of the role and activities of the organisation and its breadth of coverage. Geoff emphasised his support for the work of the Amenity Forum and the importance of maintaining high standards in sports surfaces. He referred to education and skills as a priority and the IOG's commitment to developing minimum skills standards for volunteer groundstaff and continuing to raise turf management standards. He sought an integrated approach by all bodies involved, seeking to promote very best practice. The Question Time session on the subject of weed, pest and disease control, held at SALTEX in 2013, and hosted by the Amenity Forum, had proved very successful, an example of addressing solutions in an integrated way.

BREAK OUT SESSION –WHAT SHOULD BE THE PRIORITIES FOR THE SECTOR GOING FORWARD?



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KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS



John Moverley read out a personal message from Lord De Mauley, Under Secretary of State at DEFRA. He had wished to be at the event but in the end could not. However he expressed the Government's strong support for the work of the Amenity Forum and his recognition of the real importance of the amenity sector. Copy of the letter can be found on the Amenity forum website www.amenityforum.co.uk



John then went on to announce the publication of a leaflet entitled the 'Ten Golden Rules of Pesticide Use in the Amenity Sector'. This had been distributed in conference packs. The Forum was seeking to distribute this widely across the sector. It is seen as a very good introduction to what is required, from which readers can then refer to best practice guides and other materials available on the Forum website. The Golden Rules document can be found at

<http://www.amenityforum.co.uk/Downloads/Conference2013/Controls%20on%20Pesticide%20Use%20Golden%20Rules%20Final.pdf>



Alan Spedding, Secretary of the Forum, then announced the start of another new initiative, entitled at least for now 'Amenity Management Information'. With the help of sponsors, the initiative aims to increase the amount of information available and make it easier to access. This would run alongside current best practice guides and indeed fully complement them



Finally, Paul Singleton, Chairman of the Forum's Education & Skills Committee, provided an update on Amenity Assured and its take up in the sector so far. Since its launch in November 2012, uptake has been very good although it is recognised that more need to be drawn into adopting the standard. We must work to this being the standard that everyone demands and seeks – a measure of commitment to very best practice.

Paul also provided some fascinating statistics on current coverage. This was very encouraging and also served to emphasise the spread and importance of the amenity sector.

The conference concluded with a key note presentation by John Moverley entitled:

YOUR FORUM – Current & planned activity, addressing the challenge of 'upping the sector game'

John reminded delegates of the significant progress made certainly in recent years. Membership continues to grow and the Forum can rightly claim to be the voice of the sector on matters relating to weed, pest and disease control. He listed some of the current activities:

1. Production of best practice guides
 - Principally via the web site
 - Publications – newsletters, Amenity Assured, BIGGA
2. Regular email update service
3. Organisation of seminars, workshops and our conference
4. Production of a General Newsletter & regular Chairman's Update
5. Dialogue with government, media, stakeholders etc
6. Lobbying/ influencing and more
7. Creation of sub groups
 - education & training
 - communications
 - Governance
8. Establishing an Amenity Development Group to consider longer term strategy and action
9. Creation of sector focus groups

- Golf (production of specialist best practice guide)
- Sport and Managed Turf and Lawncare
- Transport infrastructure
- Contractors
- Local Authorities
- Utilities

He made particular mention of the letter issued by CRD to CEOs of all local authorities in England and Wales. Its impact had been significant and the Forum welcomed their involvement in the initiative.

The recent special campaign to take out the message of best practice had been very successful and needs to be continued. He suggested the following key areas for doing this

- Continuing all the activities previously described
- Establishing & articulating a clear strategy for the future
- Further expanding membership
- Adding to our services & assistance to members
- Developing our communications plan & implementing it
- Develop & improve our best practice guides

Above all he urged all parts of the sector to be involved and for organisations to become members.

Hopefully this provides an insight into this important event but for further information on it or any Forum activities please contact Alan.Spedding@amenityforum.co.uk