



Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Review of the Austin "Weed and Feed" TV Commercial

Date: 01/15/2010

Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to quickly and affordably pre-test materials before they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this service, we tested 10 "social marketing" pieces from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Nonpoint Source Outreach Toolbox (<http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/>). The EPA offers these materials up as examples for others to emulate -- so they are fair game for a public critique by the panel.

This report summarizes what 25 "everyday citizens" have to say about the "Weed and Feed" commercial produced by the city of Austin, TX and the Texas Cooperative Extension. To watch the video, point your browser to:

http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/tv/TX_AustinLocal.mpg

By the Numbers

Without question, this is a strong piece. The Do Diligence Sounding Board rated the piece above average on almost every criteria.

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
The piece gets my attention	2	0	10	13	3.36	3.29
The piece has a clear message	0	0	8	17	3.68	3.46

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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The piece is believable	0	2	10	13	3.44	3.38
The issue is important to society	0	3	6	16	3.52	3.60
It is urgent to address this issue now	0	1	7	17	3.64	3.43
The issue has affected me personally, or people I care about	14	5	4	2	1.76	2.23
I could take this action, if I choose to	0	0	5	20	3.8	3.57
If I take this action, I am confident it would make a difference	0	3	7	15	3.48	3.14
If I take this action, I'm confident others will do their part, too	0	9	9	7	2.92	2.55

Your Message in Their Words

Question Wording: "Imagine that you are telling a friend, coworker, or family member about this piece. In your own words, how would you summarize the message?"

They answered like this:

- "The message warns of the dangers of one of the ingredients in "weed and feed" products."
- "Weed and feed contains an herbicide that is harmful to the ground water."
- "You should always hand pull your Weed's. You are threatening your environment with conventional herbicides".
- "Do you know that the fertilizer we use on the lawn can pollute the environment? They leak into the soil and water and we should do something to stop it."
- "Many people are unaware what is in weed and feed and the dangers of using it. It is dangerous if inhaled or comes in contact with skin. Chemicals from weed and feed are being found in water which can contaminate it and make it unsafe."
- "Many items that we use to fertilize our lawns, such as Weed and Feed, are polluting our water. "

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- "The PSA says that some weed killers contain a chemical which can be harmful to people and to aquatic life. This chemical has been found in local aquifers and wells. The PSA asks us to weed by hand instead of using chemicals."
- "Weed and feed contains atrazine which is being found in our creeks and rivers and is dangerous to humans if they eat it, breath it, or touch it."
- "Many of us use weed and feed on our lawn unaware that it contains a harmful chemical called Atrazine. Atrazine is harmful if it comes in contact with you or is inhaled. Lately it has been found in many rivers and creeks. We need to do our part to help prevent this."
- "This product will not be harmful to the environment. It will not go into the water longterm. "
- "The message concerns chemicals found in common yard fertilizer products. This chemicals is being found now in local waterways and it is alledged to have toxic properties."
- "A public service announcement about the potential chemical dangers of "Weed and Feed" and other chemicals in weed treatment packages. The ad advised viewers to use manual or spot treatment instead."
- "I found out that if you use a product called weed and feed that it can cause great harm especially if it gets into our local rivers and lakes."
- "A harmful product called Atrazine is found in weed and feed so if you have been using it on your lawn I would highly recommend that you stop using it. The product has been found to cause many problems if inhaled or swallowed and also has been found in local rivers and streams."
- "If you use weed and feed it can be harmful to yourself and can get the water as it contains atrazine so its better to not use it."
- "I watched this video that says if you use weed and feed on your lawn theres a high chance it will get into your local water. If you get the product on your self it can cause problems as the product contains a harmful chemical called atrazine."
- "Atrazine that is found in weed and feed is harmful if swallowed, inhaled, or gets in contact with a person's skin. Atrazine has been found in over half of the tested rivers and creeks and can make the water sick."
- "Applying a combination herbicide/fertilizer (known as "weed and feed") to lawns is detrimental to the water supply. Weed killing chemicals (herbicides) are showing up in streams and aquifers and contaminating them, as shown by monitoring results in streams and aquifers."
- "Do not use weed and feed it can contaminate streams and rivers with a harmful chemical called atrazine."
- "It's a video that tells you to go green instead of using weed and feed fertilizer you don't understand. "
- "Weed and feed is bad for the environment and people and it is better to go through with more natural ways such as pulling weeds to take care of the weed problem."
- "Using weed killer to take care of your lawn can introduce harmful chemicals into your water source and expose children and people who come in contact with the product. There are non-toxic alternatives to having a healthy and beautiful lawn."
- "Many of the bodies of water that have been tested have come back positive for containing atrazine which is a chemical found in weed and feed. Atrazine is harmful to swallow, inhale or touch. People should stop using weed and feed and hand pick weeds or if they must use something only do spot treatments."

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- "A dangerous chemical called atrazine has been found in over half of the tested rivers and creeks. Atrazine is a chemical found in weed and feed and is harmful to anyone who comes in contact with it."
- "Stay away from man made products!!!"

Strengths of the Piece

Question Wording: "In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "The reading of the warning label on the product."
- "The individuals reading the ingredients to the weed and feed bags."
- "The fact that such products really are hurtful to the environment."
- "The most compelling image is the baby walking barefooted on the lawn while the narrator says that the chemical can be absorbed through skin. "
- "The strongest point was informing people that weed and feed is dangerous to inhale or touch."
- "They show something that is used every day by a lot of people that is harming us. "
- "The image of the child's feet walking through grass as the narrator says the chemical can be absorbed through the skin".
- "The strongest quality of this piece was showing people admitting that they use weed and feed and are not aware of the risks or dangers it has."
- "The strongest point made was that weed and feed has a dangerous chemical in it that can harm any one who touches or inhales it. "
- "The environment and its non-harmful effects on the environment. "
- "The most compelling information is the simple fact that the chemical, which is widely used without much forethought, has environmental and health consequences. "
- "The use of images of children running on grass potentially treated with Weed and Feed"
- "Evidence that from using this product it has been found in rivers and lakes and streams which is very dangerous."
- "Making the public aware of Atrazine a deadly chemical found in weed and feed."
- "The fact a dangerous chemical is found in weed and feed and has been found in different water sources."
- "Finding the strong evidence that atrazine is being found in lakes and streams all over from people who are using weed and feed."
- "The strongest part of the video was informing people that over half of the tested rivers and creeks have atrazine in it."
- "The piece is put together well. The problem is explained clearly. I like the way the young girl asks the question about the herbicide contained in "weed and feed" and then has the question answered as the piece proceeds. The piece also tells you what you can do to help eliminate the problem (spot weed or pull weeds by hand), which is very helpful in getting people to do something."
- "The strongest evidence is shown clearly when they discovered this chemical in many major rivers lakes and streams."
- "It's great that it uses real people, not celebs."
- "Weed and feed is bad for the environment and people"

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- "Showing the small children walking on the lawn and realizing that their health could be in danger."
- "The strongest part of this video was showing the little girl walk on the lawn after weed and feed was put on and then explaining how dangerous it is. Many people are not aware of the risks and allow their children or animals on the grass so this makes a good point."
- "The strongest thing in this video was showing an innocent family unaware of weed and feed on a recently fertilized lawn."
- "The most compelling thing is that our water and environment is being contaminated and yet it can be stopped but no one really knows!"

Weaknesses of the Piece

Question Wording: "In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

They answered like this

- "The lack of details about the levels of the chemical that is showing up in area water."
- "The children."
- "Definitely the ending."
- "The weakest thing is that it is not 'scary' enough. Should show the effect of the pollution (such as dead fish or rash on the human skin). Doesn't really say what the effect of the feed and weed is on the environment and people."
- "I would explain how weed and feed ingredients are getting into water."
- "The use of the product Weed and Feed makes the piece amusing. The name makes me think of smoking pot or of feeding cows. It's hard to focus on anything else. "
- ""I'd hate to think that something we put on OUR yard to make the water sick" is perhaps a bit cheesy."
- "This piece needs to explain the harm atrazine has on water instead of just saying it make it sick."
- "This video should show people who have had problems with weed and feed."
- "No real description on the product itself. "
- "The alternatives are never defined or discussed. How successful are such products? Are they commonly found? What is the cost increment?"
- "The final image and the man asking if he can return the product. It seemed to diminish the effect by adding a "comical" capper."
- "Its hard to imagine unless it actually happens to a person so perhaps they should have given the chances you may be affected like 1 in 5 etc."
- "I beleive the evidence is a little weak at least from the video I do not think it is convincing enough."
- "Since it has not happened to many it may not seem like a real problem from viewing the video but more like a commercial to many."
- "Not telling people what they should use as an alternative that will still get them the results they are looking for when it comes to their lawn."
- "In this video I would share what other weed killers are dangerous."
- "It's a really good piece so I'm reaching for a weak point. Perhaps the piece would be better if it mentioned "weed killer" rather than "herbicide".

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- "Does not explain very well how the product is transferred into local streams and rivers very well so many will not believe this information applies to them."
- "It's a little short."
- "Too quick of a commercial."
- "The lead character comes across as neither a professional nor the neighbor next door. The spokesperson, in my opinion, should be one or the other."
- "I would explain just how many rivers and creeks have been tested positive for atrazine in an actual number to get a shock factor out of people so they are more aware how serious the issue is."
- "This video should share what other products atrazine is found in so it can be avoided."
- "Constantly pulling out weeds is not as attractive."

Shop Talk vs. Plain English

Question Wording: Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:

They answered like this:

- "atrazine"
- "Etozene"
- "Nothing. Everything very easy to understand."
- "This information was presented very clearly."
- "The people in the video mention some chemicals that are harmful for the environment and towards humans. Most people probably do not know what these are."
- "I think that my friends and family would understand this."
- "The vocabulary was all very simple."
- "All phrases and words were easy to understand."
- "atrazene"
- "N/A - the video was clear."
- "The name of the chemical, atrazine. It didn't really explain what that was, just that it was harmful."
- "I do not believe there are any phrases that would be difficult to understand here."
- "None for the moment..."
- "none available."
- "couldn't imagine any problems."
- "This video has a clear and easy to understand message."
- "Possible difficulties: "aquatic invertebrates", "aquifer monitoring", "herbicides""
- "N/A"
- "The chemical formulas were hard for me, so. "
- "No words or phrases were difficult."
- "atrozene (spelling?); aquifers"
- "This message did not have any difficult words or phrases."
- "There was not any difficult words or phrases."
- "Atrazine- a harmful chemical that is leeching into our water"

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How They Summarize the Issue

Question Wording: The piece touches on a social issue or problem. In your own words, what is this issue?

They answered like this:

- "Pollution of the environment by the use of readily available products."
- "Herbicides in ground water."
- "The damage to the environment, and possibility of injuring others."
- "Weed and Feed product pollutes the environment."
- "Most people use weed and feed without being aware of the risks."
- "We are responsible for pollution."
- "Inadvertent pollution that people cause as part of their daily activities (in this case, lawn care)"
- "Atrazine is a dangerous chemical that many people are not aware that it is in weed and feed. It has been found in rivers and creeks and is dangerous if it is eaten, breathed, or touched."
- "Atrazine is chemical in weed and feed that is not safe for people to come in contact with and is getting into the water."
- "Environmental effect. "
- "There are harmful effects with the chemicals found in common yard fertilizer. "
- "Toxic chemicals in lawn care products. "
- "Harmful chemicals have been found in lakes and rivers and other bodies of water and it seems to have come from a product called weed and feed that you use on your lawn."
- "The current problem is weed and feed is being used on lawns which is found to cause problems to your health if inhaled or swallowed and has been found in several bodies of water. The evidence is overwhelming that this product is a problem to our safety."
- "The dangerous chemical atrazine is a big problem as it can get into our local waters from using products like weed and feed and its dangerous to our health."
- "Atrazine a dangerous hazardous chemical is being found in many streams and lakes and the chemical is found in weed and feed a product you use on your lawn."
- "That weed and feed contains a dangerous chemical called atrazine and it can contaminate water and is harmful if it comes in contact with skin or is inhaled or swallowed."
- "The problem is that herbicides contained in "weed and feed" that is applied to an entire lawn is getting into streams and aquifers and contaminating them."
- "The issue is if you use the weed and feed product on your lawn it can get in the air or on your skin and can also get into local waters."
- "Green and organic enviri problems. "
- "protection of the environment"
- "Toxic chemicals that are sold and used as every day products. The need in the U.S. for homeowners to have grassy lawns."
- "People should stop using weed and feed because it is harmful to people if they swallow, inhale or touch it. Atrazine is also being found in many bodies of water."
- "Atrazine is found in weed and feed and is harmful if you come in contact with it. It has been found in rivers and creeks and makes the water sick."
- "Environmental pollution through man made pesticides".

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How This Issues Touches Them Personally

Question Wording: "If this problem has touched you personally or someone you care about, please briefly share how:"

They answered like this:

- "This problem hasn't touched me personally."
- "There is no personal way it's touched me, to my knowledge. "
- "N/A"
- "No one I know has lawn because I live in the city."
- "I have used weed killer but I don't go on my lawn for a couple days after doing so. I also do not live near any body's of water."
- "I've had people close to me become very sick because they ingested bad water, but I don't know anyone who has directly become sick from Weed and Feed."
- "n/a"
- "I do not have a yard with lawn and I use weed block plastic."
- "I have used weed and feed for years but have not had any problems as far as I could tell."
- "Did not touch me personally. "
- "This issue has fortunately not impacted anyone I know."
- "My relatives have chosen to manually remove weeds from their yards, rather than be chemically dependent on similar products that might harm them or their plants."
- "I have never heard of this problem until now."
- "I do not have a lawn so I cannot say this product has affected me personally."
- "I have not had any personal problems with this."
- "I was unaware that this was a major problem since I have not been affected by this."
- "I do not use weed killer, I have always lived in apartments with no yard."
- "The problem has affected me by changing my behavior. I stopped using "weed and feed" long ago because of the potential problem of water contamination."
- "I do not use weed and feed so it has not bothered me and I do not pay attention to what other people use."
- "It hasn't."
- "I haven't been affected by this problem yet."
- "This problem has not touched me personally or anyone that I care about, as far as I know."
- "I have used weed and feed from time to time but the only problem I have experienced personally was a burning feeling on my hands that came in contact with it."
- "I have used weed and feed before and my dog broke out in a rash after running through the grass."
- "My pets play outside and I do not want them to be poisoned by pesticides!"

The Action That is Called for

Question Wording: "The piece urges you to take some action to address the social issue or problem. In your own words, what is this action?"

They answered like this:

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- "Don't use products that could damage the local environment."
- "Don't use weed and feed, spot treat weeds instead. "
- "It urges you to take out your Weeds by hand, and avoid Herbicides."
- "Don't use herbicide or fertilizer with harmful chemicals. Pull weeds by hand or use the products on spots that is necessary only."
- "The video suggests to hand pull or spot treat weeds."
- "Stop using dangerous fertilizers and weed killers all over our lawns. Instead do spot treatments to avoid pollution."
- "Stop using chemical weed killers, and weed by hand instead"
- "This piece suggests that we should pluck weeds by hand or spot treat them."
- "Pick weeds and spot treat."
- "Avoid weed and feed products. They are showing up in our lives. "
- "Use a replacement to common yard fertilzer that may contain harmful products."
- "Think about what you're putting in your yard or garden before adding a shortcut method to get rid of pests. Its goal seems to be making a greener way of gardening less harmful to people and land."
- "If you own weed and feed or know anyone who does try to convince them to take it back and use something else as its been proven to be dangerous to our waters and even our health."
- "If you or someone you know has been using weed and feed to care for their lawn you may want to discourage them from using the product further by letting them know the dangers and problems this product has been causing."
- "You should not use weed and feed if you do have it take it back and use another safer alternative."
- "Do not use this product anymore if you have and try to spread the word about how harmful this product really is to the environment."
- "The video suggests that people hand pull weeds or spot treat them."
- "The action is to "spot weed" or "pull weeds by hand" rather than applying "weed and feed" to the entire lawn"
- "If you currently own the product stop using it immediately and make others aware of the harm the product can do."
- "USE green products, not chemicals."
- "take care of your lawn in a more natural way"
- "Hand pulling weeds."
- "The action that needs to be taken is to stop using weed and feed and pick weeds by hand or spot treat."
- "Weed and feed is dangerous so people should pull weeds by hand or only use spot treatment."
- "I do not use pesticides and I suggest to others not to use them as well because there are better alternatives.

About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to

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access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.
- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

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