

## *Proposed Code of Conduct for Aerial Fungicide Applications*

“Plant Health” is an emerging concept that is putting the aerial application industry on the verge of a new era. Aerial Applicators have the rare opportunity to offer services that are the preferred application method in the agricultural industry. Instead of hoping for plant problems each year, aerial applicators can begin building a business plan around prevention. As an industry we need to eliminate self-destructive tendencies (i.e. price cutting, turf wars, and self serving deprivation) and become a cohesive group. Our efforts with planning, understanding others' concerns, and a team mentality will allow the aerial application industry to become one of the success stories of the new millennium.

To begin the process I believe it is important that the aerial industry consider adopting a voluntary Code of Conduct in addition to the established NAAA Professional Operating Standards. The sole purpose aids each of us to be “on the same page” when dealing with the public and retail ag vendors. This article is the first attempt and reflects my point of view; however, it is by no means complete and I believe with future input from others we can arrive at an understanding that will be accepted as the standard.

### *Issue One: Out-of-State Pilots*

There are not enough pilots to meet the need in the Midwest so inevitably pilots are coming from great distances to help. The resulting problem is that techniques and etiquette are different in various parts of the country. Some states are trying to erect barriers or non-solutions (i.e. containment pads and other regulatory restrictions) to manage out of state pilots; however, a simpler, more practical solution is a code adopted and agreed upon by the industry.

Some background history of what can potentially result is the Indiana spider mite outbreak in 1988. Spider mites can devastate a soybean field within days. Out of desperation airplanes and pilots arrived from various states to help control the pest. There were so many pilots, airplanes, and lack of uniform application procedures, the public became enraged and an Indiana State Senator proposed a bill which would effectively prohibit aerial application in Indiana. Indiana's state association, even though not the cause of the problem, was left fighting for survival and had to raise funds to hire attorneys and lobbyists in an attempt to stop the bill. Only a last minute intervention by the FAA concerning airspace issues stopped the measure.

**Combining two highly charged emotional issues (low flying aircraft and pesticides) can cause a significant over-reactive public response and we as aerial applicators need to be receptive to advice from local aerial applicators to avoid negative public perceptions.**

Last year complaints in the various mid-western states were much lower than expected. Most out of state pilots worked for local operators who were able to monitor and supervise sensitive areas of activity. However, this year is shaping up to be different. Larger companies (RAF-Retail Ag Facilities) are looking for out of state operators to fly specifically for their company. This allows RAF complete control by either contracting

their own pilots and planes or buying their own fleet. The RAF can then dictate the exact time frame of application but it removes the safety net of the in-state aerial applicator sponsor. The potential problems are that the RAF have different priorities concerning fields to be sprayed and the out-of-state aerial applicator would not necessarily have the same desire or be aware of public relation (PR) concerns as one who lives in that vicinity. Not knowing the problem areas or protocols developed over many years, pilots can unintentional create a public uproar that local operators are left to resolve. The solution is simple-cooperation with each other. The phrase promoted by the NAAA last year is so appropriate: "Upon the performance of each rests the fate of all." (*PAASS Newsletter* July 30, 2007)

Probably the most important reason an out-of-state pilot should work with a local aerial applicator is profitability. There are many areas in the Midwest that are very unprofitable for aerial applicators. So there is usually a reason why RAF are seeking out of state aerial applicators rather than working with the locals. RAF are primarily concerned with getting their acres sprayed, not the aerial applicator's profitability. RAF may be dazzling you with a large total number of acres that looks intriguing but they have no differentiation as to field size, shape, or ferry distance. (For example, last year I quoted a dealer who promised average field size of 50-80 acres. In actuality, the average field size was 20 acres, fuel alone cost \$2.20 per acre, and there was no renegotiation of previously agreed price.) Before agreeing to work for any RAF it would be prudent to talk to a local applicator or the operation who worked for them the previous year.

***When operating in a area outside your normal operating radius develop a relationship with a local aerial applicator and let them sponsor and educate you on the area's particularities. Review the June 25, 2007 PAASS Newsletter on-line for a brief summary of good operating practices. Consider the long term; since our industry's future depends on relationships and the performance of other applicators, develop a plan to offer opportunities and or incentives for your sponsor. With the size of our industry it is imperative that we become sensitive to each others concerns and needs. If we fail to be concerned about these issues this new opportunity may be short lived for all of us.***

### ***Issue Two: As Applied Maps***

Last year a new situation developed. Many RAF expected and demanded raw GPS coverage maps. Many aerial applicators had little experience with them and some allowed a download of all their fields. This is an issue that our industry needs to address and take a uniform stance. I am opposed to the release of raw data GPS files for the following reasons and would encourage the aerial industry to be unified on this issue. Let's review the situation.

1. Aircraft operate outside the normal envelope of accurate GPS signal reception which can result in a distorted coverage map. There is a big difference between a ground rig operating at 12 mph with an antenna pointed directly at the satellites and an airplane moving at 120-180 mph, banking at the end of

the fields, and signal being blanked out by the fuselage having to reacquire. Ground applicators (RAF) have no understanding of these special reception problems.

2. Programs that convert raw data to a visual map handle data differently. Using the wrong conversion program can make a field that looks good in one program look erratic in another.
3. Improperly converted data along with loss of signal can result in swaths that are off target. These maps can become a serious legal problem if obtained by an uninformed party.
4. Knowledgeable RAF will not release their raw data to customers without inspecting each field and correcting data first.

There is no reason to expose the aerial industry to such scrutiny or potential litigation. Therefore I propose that the aerial application industry adopt a unified agreement in the handling of as applied data:

1. *All aerial applicators should log and save raw data for documentation.*
2. *Raw data is the property of both the applicator and the Aerial Application business in which he is employed or contracted.*
3. *Raw data should never be released.*
4. *As Applied Maps should only be made available on an as needed basis and for a pre-arranged fee. Each field needs to be inspected for accuracy and corrected if needed, prior to release.*
5. *RAF need to make prior arrangement if this data will be required because it requires a great deal of time to find and sort fields if they are not saved systematically.*
6. *Be sure that the as applied map is accurate before release. Once it becomes public property it could be viewed by the State Department of Agriculture, plaintiff's attorneys, and used in litigation against you.*
7. *Even if you know the field was flown perfectly, your coverage data may indicate something else. Your performance will not be judged on your actual application but on the printed paper map.*

The May issue of *Ag Air Update* will contain further expansion on the subject of As Applied Maps with example maps and signal problems.

### ***Issue Three: Airport Usage***

Working off public airports is a necessity and we need to do everything possible to maintain that option. With high fuel prices general aviation travel and activity is down. Many small airports are financially strapped and need our support in fuel sales and other services. In the long view we need them and they need us. It is to our benefit to support them and keep them in business. The following are some suggestions:

1. *Purchase fuel from the local airports when operating from their facilities.*

- 2. Airports are public property, operate in such a way that aircraft have no leaking check valves, loading equipment has containment and all possible leaks be contained.**
- 3. Use dry breaks when connecting to the aircraft.**
- 4. Have absorbent bags and ways to immediately clean up spills.**
- 5. Use aircraft radios and announce intentions to other traffic.**
- 6. Give way to other general aviation traffic.**

This discussion concerning a Code Of Conduct for aerial applicators is designed to be an open forum and input is solicited from other operators. Comments and concerns are requested with the goal of reaching a common consensus that aerial applicators will adopt and voluntarily comply with.

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