BIGPEPE BAN FOR MILLIONS

BIGPEPE along with the Golf Club Managers Association is supporting England Golf in its strong attempts to put forward a coherent case for golf clubs to be considered for exemptions. Paul Keeling, England Golf Club Services Manager, explains their position...
He said: "As it stands at the moment it is slightly lower than it has been previous years but not so much so that it’s causing me any great concern at the minute."

Alan explained that because this club has an older abstraction licence, the Environment Agency’s ‘Hands Off Flow Restrictions’ do not affect his allowance of water.

"In terms of the position that people are in the course we’ve here I’d rather be in than any other because of the older license and being able to physically see how high or low the water level in the ditch is just by going down and having a look,” he continued.

Alan gave some figures for how much rainfall had fallen at his course between January 1 and April 1 for the previous three years. In 2009 there was 240mm, in 2010, 249mm, in 2011, 186mm and in 2012 just 54 mm.

Lea Howkins MG, Course Manager at Richmond Golf Club, in Surrey, is under Thames Water and said: "They’re currently saying that if you don’t water your greens it’s going to be an unsafe playing surface because of the dangerous bounce."

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Lea extracts water from boreholes for irrigation and has offered to voluntarily reduce his extraction by 25%.

"We’ll just have to be more careful. Use wetting agents and ensure aeration is completed regularly so water gets in there. As it happens, since they’ve imposed the hosepipe ban, it’s rained every day. I think for some golf courses it could be a long summer if they’re not allowed to water," he said.

Billy McMillan, Course Manager at Tyrrells Wood Golf Club, in Surrey, recalled previous drought conditions as they expected.

"All those days of deep aeration, organic matter reduction and it has to be said, sometimes painful, operations in the eyes of the golfer will result in a kinder transition through a drought situation. Additionally under drought conditions we wouldn’t want to make for ourselves any additional problems by introducing further stress to the grass plant. Therefore at our club we follow a fairly simple philosophy to include a reduction in mowing and cutting heights than would be deemed normal in the main playing season. Sometimes we let clippings fly and use them as a mulching on some areas."

Another interesting point he highlighted was that of public perceptions. He mentioned that when their newly commissioned irrigation system was being tested during March 2006, it had been raining at the same time. The club received a letter from an irate passer-by who was disgusted to see irrigation on, but I wanted to explain how lessons learnt from that experience could now be applied to the current situation with regards best practice."

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"It is important what the general public perceive and can show us in a bad light, so we always have to be mindful of these things in tough times."

Continuing good practice was something other course managers believed important to prepare for environmental stresses.

Alan Pierce said: "We use wetting agents every month and we're trying to be as pro-active as we can. We've made a conscious effort to go round and check that every sprinkler is only doing the area intended and no more. We do monthly aeration with 8mm solid tines to keep the surface open and the water penetrating through. A big thing for us is that we don't let anyone play in adverse conditions, such as frost, throughout the winter, as we're not asking the surfaces to cope with more than they can handle."

Alan had written a letter to his local water authority highlighting how pro-active and efficient the club was at managing their water, with no unnecessary irrigation. It also stated that irrigation equipment was monitored to ensure its fully-working order. He said: "I'm sure they're aware that golf courses aren't just throwing water at our surfaces can be detrimental to what we want to achieve anyway."

We all know that a staggering amount of water is lost by water companies through leakages, so it is important for golf courses not to be tarred with the same brush.

Ensuring sprinklers are not worn, and that the water is distributed efficiently has never been more important. Being sure that irrigation pipes are not leaking is also key to good practice. New Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS) guidelines have been published relating to marking systems used to convey non-drinkable or non-potable water.
“Coping with the drought in 2006 was difficult. One of the toughest things to overcome was explaining to my membership why our course wasn’t in as good a condition as they expected.”

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Les Hawkins MG, Course Manager at Richmond Golf Club, in Surrey, is under Thames Water and said: “They’re currently saying that if you don’t water your greens it’s going to be an unsafe playing surface because of the dangerous bounce.”

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Billy McMillan, Course Manager at Tyrrells Wood Golf Club, in Surrey, recalled previous drought orders in 2006. He said: “It was probably one of the toughest greenkeeping years of my career. One of the toughest things to overcome was explaining to my membership why our course wasn’t in as good a condition as they expected.”

With a hosepipe ban in place and unable to draw from the mains supply, the club successfully lobbed for a limited, yet valuable, supply from their water company. He went on to explain how lessons learnt from that experience could now be applied to the current situation with regards best practice.

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Another interesting point he highlighted was that of public perception. He mentioned that when their newly-commissioned irrigation system was being tested during March 2006, it had been raining at the same time. The club received a letter from an irate passer-by who was disgusted to see irrigation on, but I wanted to highlight to them that just throwing water at our surfaces can be detrimental to what we want to achieve anyway.”

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Some water companies are already stipulating that pipework used for these purposes should have WRAS recommended markings. Currently the SportsPro PE100 pipes, by Revaho, are the only PE pipes to come with this mark as standard.

One of the main causes of concern is how the water companies have dealt with the situation. Les Howkins said: “The water companies should have gone into more consultation with sports grounds, golf clubs and bowling greens. At the end of the day, they are businesses employing a lot of people and if clubs, in the worst case scenario, fold, there will be people out of jobs. They said that car washers are still allowed to use hosepipes, well for me the golf course is a commercial business and if you can’t maintain the quality of your surfaces, you’re not providing the service to your customers.”

A course manager said: “The water company has now come up and said that you can still use water if you’re cleaning patios down or cleaning cars for a business. So they’re effectively choosing which businesses can use water. This is the problem I have, but they’re not actually writing this down.

If all these ways of getting water are taken away from us and we do have a big heat wave, will there be clubs switching on their irrigation systems regardless because they’re going to lose customers?”

Another course manager echoed this idea and said: “The maximum fine for breaching the restriction is £1,000 so it could almost be worth doing that instead of losing it.”

The extreme likelihood of mains and other water sources becoming unavailable in the coming months means preparation and action is now the key.

Lobby your water authority, from a business perspective, with the reasons why golf courses need water to operate and highlight your responsible usage.

As examples in this article have shown, lobbying does work and will continue to yield results, which may provide a lifeline for clubs through the summer months.

Because drought problems are not going to go away, it is becoming increasingly more important to store water and a self-sufficient club with its own supply would have peace of mind during future restrictions.

Millions of metres have already been installed throughout the UK & Europe!