

The Summer of '95

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell

Mark Jarrell, CGCS
Assistant Editor

It is mid-September as I sit down to write this, and already we have received more than 57 inches of rain for the year, which is normally about the total for a full year in my area.

August was especially brutal with almost 20 inches. Though we may not reach last year's total of 90 inches, I can't remember any previous summers where I had to repair the same washouts on new construction so many times.

Couple this with the worst mole cricket infestation I've ever seen and 1995 takes over as one of my worst years in the golf business.

The difficulties presented by Mother Nature are frustrating and often disheartening but I can count myself among the few fortunate superintendents who don't get ulcers worrying about job security due to weather-related problems.

Some of my peers are not so lucky. I fully expect to begin hearing of superintendents fired for "unacceptable playing conditions" about the time this magazine reaches your hands.

One of our area's most prominent superintendents was told by a greens chairman over a year ago that "they paid him enough to handle any weather-related problem."

Another in Naples told me in march that some members absolutely refused to believe that two days of frost could cause the turf to go off-color, simply because frost hadn't occurred in that area for several years and they had never seen it.

Saving your job often depends upon your people skills — diplomacy, poise and tact — over your agronomic skills when trying to deal with Mother Nature. Giving thorough and factual information in a non-confrontational manner is your best bet when explaining to a frustrated member about the imperfect playing conditions.

In the hope that I might present some information that could help save a superintendent's job because he didn't give a thorough enough answer or left out a significant point, may I offer the following points when explaining the detrimental effects of excessive rainfall:

When feeling the pressure to open the course during wet conditions, and especially about allowing cart traffic, explain that waterlogged soils will not support the weight of maintenance equipment or golf carts. Water acts as a lubricant between the mineral soil particles, and traffic will break down the soil structure.

The resulting compaction and turf damage from rutting may take weeks to correct. The excess water replaces the air in the soil's pore spaces, depleting soil oxygen and slowing the respiratory processes.

Root growth is restricted, and toxic organic acids and gases may form. Extra aerifications, which we all hate, may be necessary to release these gases, stimulate root growth, put oxygen into the root zone and restore soil structure, so carefully consider the consequences of traffic on a wet golf course.

In addition, turfgrasses will *luxury consume* excess water and nutrients, causing cell walls to become elongated and weak. The softer tissue breaks apart more easily under traffic, making the grass plant more vulnerable to attack from the many parasitic fungi that thrive under the wet conditions.

Thinking only of the lost income from keeping the course closed may be false economy; the extra money that may be needed for fungicides and aerification may be greater than the additional revenue.

As any good superintendent knows, raising the mowing height on greens during stressful conditions, such as those created during heavy and frequent rains, gives the turf a better chance of surviving

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the adverse conditions, but the typical member doesn't know this, so save yourself some grief by educating them to the facts.

Be prepared to explain your need for budget revisions because of the fertilizer and pesticides that are washed away during excessive rains.

Finally, I'd like to say a word about Primo. Typically, all of us who write for your FGCSA publications avoid sounding commercial, but it fits into the subject of my article, and I would be remiss in not pointing out how useful it is during Florida's rainy season. At Palm Beach National I have a mix of bermudagrasses in my fairways and was worried about the effects of Primo before I started using it

in 1993.

I'm happy to say that the use of Primo at 14 ounces per acre, every six weeks or so, actually tightens the grasses up and makes them appear more consistent. Cell walls are stronger and better resist fungal invasion. These are the side benefits.

The real value of Primo is in the fact that I have sometimes gone ten days between mowing of fairways due to persistent wet conditions and, when we were able to mow, we weren't "bailing hay" as we would have been in previous years prior to using Primo.

I know some superintendents haven't yet tried it — probably due to its high cost — but be sure you factor in the importance of increased quality and playability

in your cost-to-benefit evaluation.

As frustrating as bad weather is, I know most superintendents don't mind having to face Mother Nature's challenges. It just seems unfair that we also have to fear for our jobs when she kicks us in the teeth.

After 26 years in the golf business, I have to chuckle at those romantic environmentalists who view Mother Nature as perfect and benign.

Don't these people ever watch public television? They obviously don't have jobs in natural resource management. Life is a constant struggle and Mother Nature can be your best friend or your worst enemy.

Good luck to us all!



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