

Well, it should be official by now that most of the state is tightening water restrictions as golf season begins. Collier and Lee counties have likely gone to Phase III, reducing water use by 45 percent by the time this goes to press. Residential landscapes may now be watered only one day per week. Other areas of the state are certainly not far behind. All facilities that have restricted consumptive-use water permits will be facing difficult times.

## Less Water, More Golfers

There is an old saying that “What does not kill you will make you stronger.” I believe this to be true. I also believe that much good can come from this drought in the long run, maybe because I know it will not last forever. We need to think seriously about how we can document and demonstrate ongoing water conservation and not just when it is a drought-response cutback.

One good thing that can come from this is that we all become better educators and communicators. We must improve the education of our staffs, teaching what we all know but might not have had to use for years: how to manage our turfgrass with less water than normal, the proper use of wetting agents and which varieties tend to hold more water.

We must also communicate more effectively with everyone involved at the club about what is actually involved with water restrictions. We must use every angle to continue to remind our members what we/they are faced with. We must communicate with the golf professionals, general managers, and assistant managers, use the club’s newsletter, club e-mail... anything that will get the word out, just in case someone has missed those brown fairways and roughs.

This situation is unlike others such as an outbreak of disease or other issue that might have been prevented. This is out of our hands, and hopefully presenting the facts over and over will show members and others that the water restrictions are a short-term event and not an excuse for conditions.

We must openly and honestly communicate what type of restrictions we are facing. Does your facility have effluent water that is or is not restricted? Are you solely reliant on surface water from your lakes or wells? We must help each other by being good stewards of our profession. Many in our area have only one source of irrigation water, that being surface water. Those clubs are going to be hit the hardest

in the beginning.

We all have been there – standing in the pro shop or out on the course and a member approaches and says, “Have you seen XYZ club? They are really in bad condition.” Here is the critical point. How do you answer? Hopefully you know enough about the club they are discussing and you can respond in a positive, truthful and supportive manner.

First we should ask if the facility is really in bad condition as the member says, or is it just dry grass? You know the XYZ club relies only on restricted surface or lake water. Since their normal supply has been reduced by 45 percent for the same period last year, which is why they are brown now.

God forbid, but water restrictions may be here to stay, given Florida’s growth and development demands. Maybe the time is now to begin planning for the future. Now may be the time to consider installing a new irrigation system or upgrading your existing system. Utilizing decreased spacing on irrigation head placement might be one option. Installing ET-based weather stations, or just installing newer technology sprinkler heads might help improve efficiency to stretch our water supplies.

Maybe it is time to look at reducing the amount of irrigated acres. This can be done in many ways but maybe the simplest is spraying out the turf, removing the irrigation and installing native plant material in out-of-play areas. They do not have to be large areas; many small areas that are truly out of play will add up quickly. Other ideas might be to install crushed shell or other ground covers that do not require irrigation. Either way, the projects can easily be sold on the number of gallons of irrigation that can be saved each year, not to mention the reduced man-hours and fertilizer and chemical costs to maintain these areas.

Beginning in December, the South Florida Water Management District began a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss long-term solutions to water issues. Joel Jackson, CGCS, our executive director, has been attending these meetings on our behalf. In the upcoming months you will begin to see what comes from these meetings which will certainly help to shape the near future for water use in this region.

Hopefully by being positive and proactive in dealing with the water restrictions, we will survive yet another season. If all of this fails, I remember the words of J. Mark Black, CGCS: “Matt, grass putts the best right before it dies.”

So we have that going for us. ■



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President*