USGA pushes for soil lab certification

BY MARK LESLIE

F AR HILLS, N.J. — Striving to assure that golf courses are served by "competent laboratories that are putting their full effort into it," the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) is proceeding full-steam ahead toward instituting an accreditation program.

The USGA is working with the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (AALA), a Washington, D.C.-based organization which has accredited more than 800 labs of various kinds. The 15 or so soil labs which test root-zone mixes for golf course construction, have never had an accreditation program to pass, and react among them is mixed.

"I've gotten good feedback from [lab representatives] happy to see it," said Jim Snow, national director of the USGA Green Section. "I just want the people who are serious about doing good work to get accredited. It has a lot of good purposes."

Dr. Norm Hummel of Cornell University, who studied the lab situation for the USGA two years ago and who himself runs a lab, said the requirements of accreditation "will immediately shake out some of the labs."

Saying he was intimidated at first and that one lab is "suspicious that anybody can be taught," Hummel added: "There will be some resistance because it will force everybody to do things according to protocol, to have an internal quality-control program."

Indeed, one of the leaders in the industry, Turf Diagnostics & Design (TDD) in Olathe, Kan., takes exception to the accreditation, though for other reasons.

"Who's got the level of expertise to tell us we're accredited or not?" asked Vice President Steve McWilliams. "We can document what we do but, frankly, we don't see anyone qualified out there to tell us we're doing it right or wrong."

Saying his lab follows protocol and more, and adding that several changes in the USGA specifications were derived directly from TDD's procedures, McWilliams said: "I'm not sure it [accreditation] is going to fly. This is not an easy issue.

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Regions are reorganized to better serve course clients

BY JIM SNOW

F AR HILLS, N.J. — The United States Golf Association's (USGA) Green Section has reorganized several of its regions in an effort to provide better service to clubs and courses in its Turf Advisory Service. Starting in the East, Ohio and Kentucky will become part of the new North-Central Region. The North-Central Region will include Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Montana. These states will be serviced by newly-appointed regional director Bob Brame, in Kentucky, and Bob Vavrek, near Milwaukee.

The Mid-Continent Region will gain Illinois and Iowa in the reorganization. Colorado and Wyoming will move to the Western Region. Jim Moore will remain regional director from his office in Waco, Texas, and Paul Vermeulen will be moving from the Western Region office to establish a new office in central Illinois.

The Western Region will pick up Colorado and Wyoming. Larry Gihuly will remain as regional director from his office near Seattle. Pat Gross and a new agronomist yet to be named will serve the southern part of the region from their office in southern California.

The USGA Green Section is hoping that by establishing more than one office in a region — as was done in the Northeastern Region 10 years and in the Western Region in 1993 — it can provide better service.