Cold stressed at the Maine turf conference

By MARK LESLIE

ROCKPORT, Maine — Hardening off cool-season turfgrasses is the most important factor in turf surviving a winter of freezing stresses, according to Dr. William Torello, turf program director at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Speaking at the Maine Turfgrass Conference and Show here March 7, Torello said superintendents should make every effort to accumulate volumes of carbohydrates within the turf plant. Higher carbohydrate levels mean less internal ice crystal formation — "the kiss of death" — within the plant, he said.

Torello told superintendents to enhance the hardening process by:

• Increasing mowing heights, which "does great things for you. Even if you only bring it up 1/8 inch, it makes a big difference because you have increased leaf area and green tissues, which means higher carbohydrate production during the fall, increased storage, and increased concentration of stored carbohydrates in the crown which is going to give you a much better-prepared turf."

• Decreasing or eliminating soluble nitrogen (N) applications as the fall progresses. "Make no N applications after Oct. 15 — earlier in Maine," he warned. "How does nitrogen interfere with the hardening process? The more N picked up by the plant, the more protein it makes. Protein is made by taking carbohydrate and attaching ammonium nitrogen to it. It takes away carbohydrate." Dormant applications are an exception, he said.

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The play's the thing, say supers who hit the links

By PETER BLAIS

All superintendents may not play as much or as well as Jim Dusch of Atlanta National Golf Course in Alpharetta, Ga.

"But it's hard to see how you can do this job and not play the game," said Dusch, winner of this year's GCSAA Championship and a self-described I-handicap player. "My goal is to get the course to the point where it is agronomically sound and playable in my eyes."

Dusch tries to play his course at least once a week. He watches how the ball rolls on the greens, how bunkers are raked and how worn the tees are as both a superintendent and a golfer.

"You don't have to be a great golfer," he said. "But you should know what the course looks like to the people playing your course. Playing helps you understand what is good and what is bad from the player's perspective. I'm not saying someone who doesn't play can't have a great course. But it would be tougher if you weren't a player."

Charles Passios, head super

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Beating the water woes in Nevada

By ALTON PRYOR

LAUGHLIN, Nev. — Emerald River Resort and Country Club stretches for four miles along the Colorado River where it is carved out of rough and unforgiving desert. Built in 1980 on 360 acres of a desert base, it requires huge amounts of water to cope with high summer temperatures. For golf course superintendent Jay Long, water is his biggest concern. Even though he pumps from the giant Colorado River, flowing only a fairway from the course, water is an expensive commodity and Long has had to discover ways to reduce that expense.

"We pump out of the river, but cost for water is very high," Long said. "I'm budgeting $250,000 a year for water and that isn't enough. We are charged $1.94 per thousand gallons, which is the residential rate, and the courseraters on the pumps to make sure we don't cheat. When the courts broke up the water rights among the states on the Colorado River, Nevada didn't get a very big share."

Long said he applies about 50 acre feet per year to his green areas — about 75 acres. During the summer, when temperatures soar to as high as 125 degrees,
Emerald River was to be a master-planned hotel and casino, with an outdoor amphitheater. It's developers were anticipating the facility would be the nicest destination resort facility in Laughlin. The skeleton of the unfinished casino stands on the course, a reminder of how shifty the sands of junk bond financing can be.

Along with the unfinished casino is an unfinished water pipeline which was supposed to bring effluent from Laughlin to water the golf course. The pipeline was abandoned after an investment of about a half million dollars.

In June 1995, Paine Webber took control of the development and hired Golf Enterprises, Inc. to manage it. Since then, more than $300,000 has been invested in the course. Long was transferred from the Great Southwest Golf Club in Dallas, also managed by Golf Enterprises.

While the course was originally designed for about 40 rounds per day during the peak season in January, it gets about 120 rounds each day.

One of Long's first priorities, on arriving was to aerate wall-to-wall. "A lot of the water put on the golf course was running off into the desert," he said. "During the past year, we have aerified eight times."

Not only does Long have to contend with high water prices, but with 50- to 60-foot changes in elevation at various points and the length of the course from end to end - four miles. That is a drag on the pump station.

"At our pump stations, we are running at 140 psi pressure just to move the water around the course," he said. "By the time water gets out to our furthest and highest point, we are down to 80 psi. We get a lot of pressure loss."

The pump has a capacity of 3,200 gallons of water per minute, but in his normal daily operations, Long pumps about 1,100 gpm.

Heavy thunderstorms are prone to hit the area, causing some flash flooding. This causes Long some headaches in maintaining golf cart paths. "The main damage is from mud washing onto the paths. It never really damages the course itself." Emerald River has all the stuff of which legendary golf courses are made. There is the natural landscaping, beautiful vistas of both the mountains and the wide Colorado River, and a layout that challenges all levels of players — and superintendents.