Superintendents reshape state water restrictions

By ANDREW OVERBECK

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Following the drought of 1999 when sudden water restrictions forced golf courses in parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey to cut irrigation use by as much as 90 percent, superintendents in both states teamed up with other green industry partners to retool drought emergency rules. Working closely with each state's department of environmental protection, the industry has achieved or is close to achieving new water restrictions that will not negatively impact golf courses. The three years of hard work is already paying off, as 26 counties in Pennsylvania and all of New Jersey have declared drought emergencies.

SUCCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

According to superintendent Bill Wall here at Dauphin Highlands Golf Club, the vague restrictions that the Pennsylvania DEP put forth in the summer of 1999 simply created confusion. "The drought regulations opened the door to the people who were going to abuse them or ignore them altogether," said Wall. "Some guys got screwed for cutting back because their courses went brown while others who ignored it had green turf."

Spurred on by the late Dave Rafferty who was the superintendent at Chambersburg Country Club, Wall put together a group of superintendents from across the state and the DEP held meetings to discuss flaws in the regulations. "They didn't have any golf course experts," Wall said. "This stuff is a different language to golfers."

Moss hits Colorado hard, more research needed

By KEVIN ROSS, CGCS

DENVER — A recent symposium here brought superintendents from across Colorado together to discuss the sudden invasion of moss on greens. The problem is clearly widespread, as more than 140 superintendents attended the meeting to learn more about how to combat the rapidly spreading bryophyte. There are still, however, more questions than answers.

The symposium featured Dr. Tony Koski from Colorado State University; Matt Nelson from the United States Golf Association's Green Section; Matt Giese from Syngenta; and John Wymee from Bio-Safe Systems. Rusty Oetker from Soil Solutions also held a roundtable discussion. The group presented information about the spread of moss, various research efforts, and possible control options.

According to Dr. Koski, controlling moss is difficult for three central reasons. "Moss is a very resilient and tough plant and we don't really know that much about it because there has been little hardcore research done," said Koski. "It is also very difficult to selectively eradicate."

In Colorado, the moss plant on greens has been identified as Silvery Thread moss or B. argenteum.
Superintendents retool restrictions

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them, and we really lead the way in rewriting some drought regulations. They will still reduce water use, but it will make it more manageable for professionals in the field.

The new restrictions were unveiled in late February. Golf courses must submit a watering plan to their commonwealth drought coordinator and are allowed to water at an average daily rate that does not exceed 70 percent of the course's five-year calendar month basis quantity.

Watering is still limited to the hours of 5 p.m. and 10 a.m., but hand watering and syringing is allowed during the day.

"We didn't mind restricting water use, but we wanted to be able to have the ability to use the water how we saw fit at our course," Wall said. "We simply told them that if they wanted to cut the water back, they should let us as professionals decide how to use the water."

According to Ron Ruman with the Pennsylvania DEP, Wall and other green industry members were very helpful. "We are trying to work with all businesses so that they can continue to operate," he said. "But we hope that all courses follow the letter of the law and reduce the quantity that they are using because this is a very serious situation that we are in."

Ruman said that local police will enforce the new policy and all golf courses must submit plans to their commonwealth drought coordinator before beginning any irrigation this season.

NEW JERSEY REGS IN LIMBO

Superintendents in New Jersey have taken a similar approach to reworking water restrictions, but are still waiting for confirmation from officials with New Jersey's DEP.

"We started meeting with the DEP in 1999 because they required other industries to cut back water use by 25 percent, but golf courses were forced to reduce use by 90 percent and only water greens and tees," said Chris Carson, superintendent at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield. "We felt it was unfair from an agronomic and economic standpoint and we have worked hard as an industry to get a logical plan in place. We have not achieved that yet, but they have heard us and we hope that we will be treated as a business and not as a luxury item."

The entire green industry in New Jersey came together to form the Alliance for Water Conservation and has been working with Rutgers University to quantify the economic impact of the turfgrass industry and formulate best management practices for water use on golf courses.

"Golf is currently labeled as non-essential by the state," said Glenn Miller, superintendent at Manasquan River Golf Club. "But the green industry is a billion dollar industry in New Jersey. Similar to those in Pennsylvania, we have been working with the state to come up with a workable year-round conservation plan cuts back water use, but that lets us use the water where we deem necessary."

With restrictions imminent, Miller expects new rules to be announced soon and is optimistic that they will be easier on golf courses.

"We are in better shape now than we were three years ago," he said. "Being proactive is the key."

Delaware, Audubon

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environment. Audubon International's president and CEO Ron Dodson hopes Delaware's efforts will catch on in other states. "One-hundred percent participation in the program nationwide may occur some day," he said. "But at least today, we are one step closer to that goal. I hope that the DSGA initiative will be replicated in states and regions throughout the country."

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