Ten years later, Squaw Creek still largely chemical-free

By DOUG SAUNDERS

OLYMPIC VALLEY, Calif. — When the Resort at Squaw Creek opened in 1992, it was hailed as one of the first largely chemical-free golf courses in the country. The course was built during an era when golf courses were under intense scrutiny and suspicion as being toxic polluters, and these concerns ground golf development in California to a standstill.

The Resort at Squaw Creek became a test course for new ideas to control the use of chemical applications as well as promote new course management techniques. To obtain final approval, the developers and governing agencies attempted by compiling a Chemical Application Management Plan (CHAMP) that spelled out a specific turf management program for the golf course to follow. Today the course still functions under these restrictive policies under the direction of superintendent Mike Carlson, who is only the second superintendent to care for this mountain course.

"I had very good knowledge of the course as I profiled its strict environmental policy and approach in my master's thesis at the University of Wisconsin. The last seven years have been very challenging, but also very rewarding," said Carlson, who came to the course in 1993 from Butler...
Courses repair drought damage

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irrigation applications for new seeding. Other drought regulations restrict total usage, but it is up to the superintendents to determine distribution. In both cases, fall aeration and overseeding/regrassing plans can move forward, albeit in a somewhat restricted fashion.

Where overall water consumption is curtailed, turf managers needing to regrass must make hard choices where to cut back regular irrigation for use on seeding establishment. With reduced fall play, tees can be consolidated; irrigation and mowing can be stopped once turf goes dormant and practice facilities can be closed in order to ration water.

GREEN RECOVERY

Where water restrictions are still in place, efforts should focus on putting green surface recovery since weak turf is more susceptible to winter injury. Fertilize more often or at higher rates to increase density and strengthen plants and plan a heavy application for late fall. Aeration and overseeding will be needed to recover turf quality but a decrease in aeration tine size may be appropriate. Communicate these limitations to course officials and prepare for an aggressive spring aeration schedule.

Despite water restrictions, overseeding of greens must be done this fall to regain density and putting quality. Frequently done in conjunction with fall aeration, overseeding can proceed as a stand-alone practice. Proper seed placement (approximately a half-inch deep), seed to soil contact and post-seeding maintenance will be especially critical. Light sand topdressing and brooming will help to work the seed into the soil. This tactic will minimize playing surface disruption and moisture loss. If it rains, seed is ready. If not, little harm is done and seed may still be viable in the spring.

If various factors make rough seeding a poor choice for your facility this fall, then weed control should be emphasized. Herbicide treatments are very effective in the autumn, provided weeds are actively growing; one adequate rain can rehydrate drought-stressed weeds. Be prepared to treat weeds one day or so following rainfall—keep products in stock, calibrate sprayers ahead of time and pre-calculate tank rates. Finally, plan on more weed control next year, too. Weed populations explode the year after a drought due to turf thinning.

Kathy Antaya is an agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Northeast Region.

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