Winterkill research yields new clues

By KEVIN J. ROSS, CGCS and ANDREW OVERBECK

One of the most difficult times of year for Snowbelt superintendents is the moment of truth each spring when they find out how well their winterkill prevention activities worked. Prior to and during winter, superintendents face numerous choices concerning ice and snow removal, free water removal and the use of covers. However, winterkill remains an enigma, because what worked one year does not necessarily work in another year.

Research on winterkill has been going on for decades and a miracle cure is yet to be found. But researchers are focusing in on several aspects of winterkill causes to try to pinpoint the exact reasons why damage occurs.

In general, winter damage is defined as any injury that occurs during the wintertime period. Winter damage can be inflicted by winter damage fungi (low molds and cool season pythiums), crown hydration, ice damage (suffocation), direct low temperature kill and desiccation. Of these, only true winter diseases and desiccation are understood, while ice cover damage and crown hydration are still not totally understood.

DOES ICE COVER KILL?

For years ice damage has been associated with a gas build-up that occurs just under the ice surface. Under prolonged ice cover, oxygen is depleted from the plant that is still under very low levels of respiration and microbe activity. This results in an accumulation of toxic gases that may result in death of the plant. Researchers generally follow the rule that Poa annua can survive under ice cover for up to 60 days, while bentgrass can survive up to 90 days. This rule, however, is being revisited.

Significant winterkill damage impacted courses from Minnesota to Maine this year.

"There is a popular theory that if the ice remains on turf for too long that you end up with dead turf," said Dr. George Hamilton, assistant professor of turfgrass science at Penn State University. "Why it happens has not been shown or even if it happens because of suffocation. That is why you see devastating ice damage only once or twice a decade. If suffocation caused damage, people would get it every year because there are parts of the course that are covered by ice for months."
GCSAA posts financial information online

By ANDREW OVERBECK

LAWRENCE, Kan. — In a move to become more transparent, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America’s (GCSAA) board of directors has decided to post its pertinent financial documents as part of the “About GCSAA” section of its Web site.

The IRS Form 990 for the GCSAA and the Environmental Institute for Golf for the period from June 2001 to July 2002 are available in addition to salary ranges for staff and specific salaries for executive positions. According to GCSAA communications director Jeff Bollig, the information posted on the Web site has always been available through the association’s service center in paper form, but board members decided that the financial details should be made more easily accessible.

“There has been a lot of talk of financials over the years and the board wanted to put as much as possible on the Web,” he said. “As much as our members like to think that we are not open, we are terribly open.”

In addition to salary information, the association posted IRS forms that reveal the GCSAA lost more than $1 million over the period including investment losses that totaled almost $1 million. The Environmental Institute for Golf posted a loss of $590,931 including investment losses of $581,002.

For more information, visit www.gcsaa.org.

Agronomic Systems

Continued from page 6

in Scituate, Mass., and Newnan (Ga.) Country Club.

“I show them where they can save money or reallocate funds,” Hofstetter said. “Many courses are reallocating saved money back into the course and improving the facility. So they are not taking money away from superintendents.”

According to Hofstetter, the single largest culprit blowing maintenance budgets is overtime.

“A lot of clubs are running excessive amounts of overtime,” he said. “I walk in and see courses running 25 to 30 hours of overtime a week in non-peak months. In that situation, it is cheaper to hire an additional worker.”

Hofstetter said inventory control is another area where money can be saved.

“A majority of the time, instead of using one product to solve a problem you see the kitchen sink being thrown at a problem. I identify the fact that one product can fill a need, not seven products,” he said.

Other areas that are covered in the evaluation are organization, shop cleanliness, detail around the facility and time and efficiency studies.

In addition to the evaluations, Hofstetter brings the power of national accounts to his clients.

“We have national account status behind us that can produce significant cost savings,” he said. “The national account groups I work with have known me for a number of years and see the amount of business that I generate when I recommend products, purchases or materials.”

Once he has finished an evaluation, courses can choose to bring Hofstetter back in quarterly, monthly or not at all. He currently visits four clubs monthly and 12 courses quarterly to provide follow-up services.

Looking ahead, Hofstetter said he would like to team with smaller management companies.

“Companies with four to five courses don’t have the income to hire a full-time agronomist, but they could utilize Agronomic Systems to provide a higher level of maintenance to their customer.”

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