Irrigation system questions

I feel Erik Christiansen’s column (“Satellites, Decoders and Disaster,” January, page 23) is grossly inaccurate. A new 1,400-head, FD 101 decoder irrigation system was installed five years ago here at Aurora Hills Golf Course near Denver, Colo. The system was installed according to all manufacturer specifications including lightning. The Denver area is a very arid climate with average rainfall of less than 15 inches a year. Denver also receives a high amount of lightning strikes each year. In a five-year period less than 10 FD101 decoders have had to be replaced because of lightning. Christiansen’s comments about decoder systems falling short in lightning protection and survivability are just not the case. The performance of our decoder irrigation system is second to none. I am a little confused by Christiansen’s statements about decoders, as well. In Jeffrey Brauer’s column in the same issue (page 18), he mentions Mr. Christiansen designed a decoder system that was installed at Firekeeper to reduce wire, labor costs, field controllers and should reduce potential for lightning strikes. What gives?

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Erik Christiansen responds

System users, irrigation designers and industry friends responded to my January column with an interesting mix of agreement, disagreement and personal experiences. As with many issues superintendents face daily, no one answer fits; nor does one professional’s experience translate to all others. Both system types are proven successful, and both have been around for at least 50 years sporting a variety of brands, versions and applications. Users of each type have had good and bad experiences. Based on my experiences as a professional irrigation consultant, both satellite and decoder systems have very loyal followings. Irrigation designers, superintendents and sometimes even contractors tend to polarize toward one or the other.

Over the years, I’ve designed both types of systems and have seen both succeed. I openly discuss with clients the pros and cons of both system types and how they apply to their specific projects, site conditions, budgets, crews and other factors. My goal is to use all of the facts, experience and data to provide the absolute best advice to my clients, according to their needs and resources.

I stand by my recommendation under the scenario presented: For a large system in a hot, arid, lightning-prone area, where a lack of irrigation can damage turf within 24 to 48 hours, I would recommend a system that had the greatest back-up watering capability – a satellite system.

I enjoyed the feedback and appreciate everyone who took the time to write in or contact me. To me, this is what makes a great column topic – people openly sharing their depth of knowledge and experiences that offer practical benefits to current and future decision makers.