

# WATSON ON THE ENERGY CRISIS

*The following are highlights from a speech given to the 44th Annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference, which was held in January in East Lansing, Mich., by James R. Watson, vice president, The Toro Company.*

The energy crisis, according to Watson, does not now threaten golf courses and other recreational facilities; it can be a "real opportunity to provide more service than ever before to the members and users of all turf facilities."

Watson's most important bit of advice to golf course superintendents about the energy crisis and its implications is "stay cool." Superintendents should assess the short-term implications of the crisis and deal with them. This will provide a base for the preparation and development of solutions for long-range problems.

A Toro Market Planning Department survey of superintendents whose courses range from Washington to Florida confirmed that golf course superintendents are excellent planners. They plan their operational programs, develop alternative plans in the event of budget curtailment, carefully weigh all conditions, and then choose the best program for their particular operation. The turfgrass manager must know how much it costs to grow and to maintain his turfgrass facility at the level desired by his club or controlling organization. He must know what his expenditures produce in terms of lower operating costs, and he must be prepared to defend his budget.

Fuel costs make up only 2 or 3 per cent of the total golf course budget. Even in those instances where the cut-back in fuel supplies was as high as 25 per cent, the superintendents foresaw few major problems in continuing a high level of maintenance.

Unless the country resorts to fuel rationing, these men saw no reason for major modification of their normal operating procedures. They recognize that maintenance will be more important than ever—not only to ensure the best possible playing conditions, but also to protect the heavy investment in



property values that members have made.

#### INCREASED PLAY

The one certainty to look for from the energy crisis is an increase in play on local courses. Recreational travel—whether by car or plane—has already been affected. Flight schedules have been cut back, and those planes that do take off are almost fully loaded. Few automobile drivers want to take an extended trip that includes the risk of being stranded *en route*. This means that the parks and the golf courses closer to home will get the brunt of the recreational traffic. Heavier play will put greater stress on fairways and greens. This can only be countered with good maintenance practices and careful planning.

The superintendent must examine the performance of his equipment, his operating procedures and his maintenance programs to ensure efficiency at all levels. But fuel costs and prices, at this juncture, do not appear to constitute a serious enough problem to call for ingenious solutions to the energy crisis. A straightforward, simple approach seems to be all that is called for.

#### EFFECTS OF THE ENERGY CRISIS

A Pennsylvania superintendent said his fuel supplies have been cut back 25 per cent since last September. A Florida

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superintendent, who operates close to 150 pieces of gas-powered equipment, has had his supplies cut 15 per cent. Neither man anticipates having any maintenance problems.

But if supplies should be cut further or rationing instituted, most superintendents said they would reduce the maintenance of roughs and try to continue the normal operations on tees, greens and fairways. Should the situation tighten even further, they would consider altering the mowing frequencies and fertilizer applications on fairways and roughs and look for alternative power sources.

Higher fuel costs would send them looking for equipment that gets the job done with fewer men—laborsaving, multipurpose equipment, possibly diesel-powered.

The deep conviction of golf course superintendents that highly mechanized equipment is the most effective way to reduce labor costs has even begun to affect golf course architects, who rarely considered maintenance equipment needs a few years ago. Today, on a number of courses, traps

are placed farther away from greens than they used to be in order to accommodate fringe trimmers. There are fewer "fingers" in the traps, so that sand raking machines can operate more efficiently. Other signs of the architects' new awareness of maintenance needs are gentle slopes on and away from tees and large aprons on the greens.

**LABOR COSTS OUTWEIGH FUEL COSTS.** Over the last several years, the most rapidly rising cost factor on the golf course has been labor. In 1972 alone, this cost component rose 12 per cent. Any increase in fuel costs makes it more important to reduce labor costs through the use of sophisticated, labor-saving equipment.

The following five steps will help superintendents conserve fuel while ensuring quality turf.

Select the most efficient piece of equipment for each job.

Cut down the number of blades in a reel.

Use diesel fuel.

Use clean, properly adjusted equipment.

Change mowing practices.

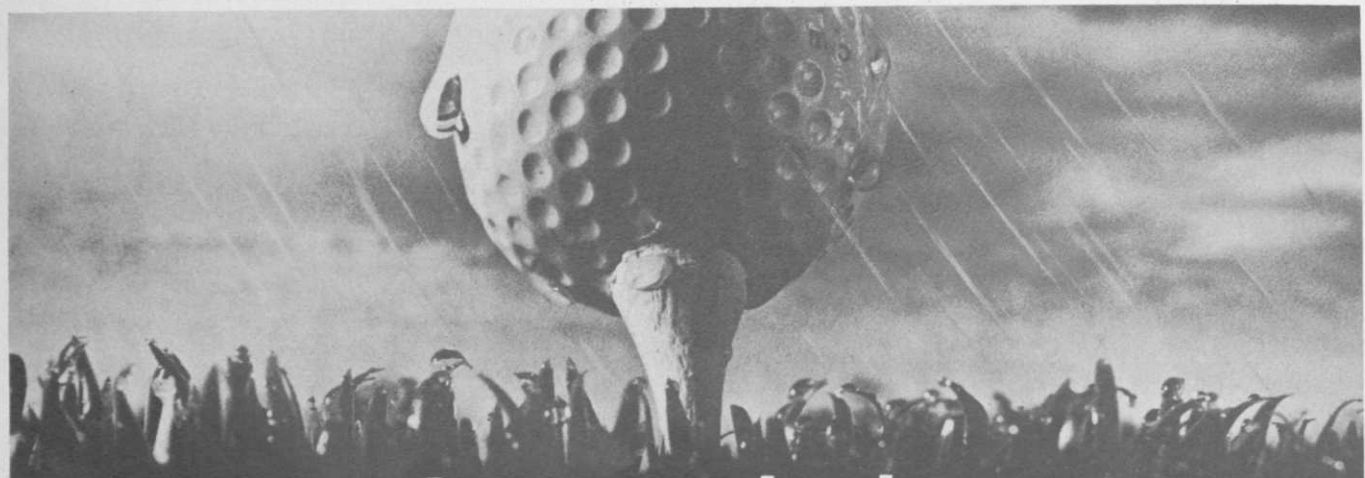
#### INCREASE IN OIL BY 1980

The very reputable British magazine, *The Economist*, predicted that the world will have an oil glut by 1980, triggered by the current crisis. The oil-consuming nations have all instituted methods—mandatory or voluntary—to save on fuel and to search out new oil supplies and other sources of energy. As a result *The Economist* stated that there will again be more than enough oil to drive down prices.

Whether we reach a state of an over-abundance of oil or not, it is very clear that we can no longer afford to waste the resources that the land has given us in such bountiful measure. It has been a rude shock for many Americans who have always been told, "nothing is impossible," to discover that there *are* limitations.

A look at Europe, where expensive fuel has been a fact of life for a long time, should help us cope with the shortages that now confront us. Although the development of golf courses on the Continent has lagged far behind ours, the Europeans have a more

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highly-developed system of green belts serving densely populated areas. These green belts—mostly small parks and wooded areas—are heavily used.

Americans can look for an increased use of parks and woods near heavily populated areas. If access to free-wheeling cars and skies full of planes is diminished, there may be an American renaissance of hiking, hosteling, and cross-country skiing. Bowling greens and lawn games may return to our towns. The network of more than 11,000 golf courses—one of America's national treasures—will increase in importance as we move further into this new age of shortages.

As the demands on these facilities grow—and they are bound to—scientists and researchers will have to keep pace with new turf management techniques and products. In the last quarter of a century, there have been such achievements as: new warm and cool season turfgrasses; fertilizers; fungicides; herbicides; insecticides, and turf equipment. That kind of developmental work will provide the basis for continually satisfactory turfgrass areas.

The energy crisis provides turfgrass managers with their greatest challenge and their greatest opportunity in years. The production and maintenance of good turfgrass facilities can only grow in importance, for they are a vital part of our way of life. □

## QUALITY TURF *from page 56*

thereby reducing the number of times per season that you must cover the same area.

Too much mowing can waste power, as can allowing the grass to grow too long, which may require subsequent cleanup operations. Try to remove no more than one-third of the blade of grass at each mowing. Greens will still require daily mowing, but you can revise mowing schedules for all other areas.

Other conservation suggestions are these:

1. Keep the gas pump locked to avoid theft;
2. Avoid spilling while refueling. You'll want your operators to avoid hot rodding and jack rabbit starts and stops. This may bring the additional benefit of reducing breakdowns;
3. Turn off the engine when not in use; there is no productive work done while idling;
4. A governor installed on the engine is the most efficient means of ensuring uniform speed. It is not always necessary to operate machines at maximum rated RPM. With hydrostatic propulsion drive, you can reduce engine speed and still maintain the desired ground speed. The reduced speed will save fuel.

Fertilization and water practices affect the frequency of mowing. Soil analysis may not only save money on

fertilizer, but will eliminate the possibility of over fertilizing, therefore reducing frequency of mowing while maintaining good growth and color in the grass. An efficient sprinkler system, which evenly distributes and controls moisture, influences the growth of grass; that, in turn, dictates the frequency of mowing. Don't water any more than is absolutely necessary.

Fuel can be saved, but it will require special effort on the superintendent's part to reduce gasoline consumption 10 to 20 per cent. Select the proper machine for the job, keep equipment properly maintained and adjusted and make full use of your managerial talent. Any one of the steps listed is not critical for fuel conservation, but all of them will give you the opportunity to save fuel without sacrificing good turfgrass management practices. □

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