

## Stop vandals before they damage your course



For the first time in many years, violent crime is down in the United States. In stark contrast to this trend, however, vandalism continues to climb at an alarming rate. It is difficult to determine the exact extent of the increase since it is estimated that only about a fourth of all vandalism is even reported to the police.

Because of their unique accessibility, golf courses suffer more than their share of the costs involved in the repair of damaged property. A "lawn job" (the driving of a vehicle purposely through a lawn) may cause only aggravation to the home owner or farmer. But to the golf course superintendent, it means hours of expensive labor, inconvenience to his patrons and, if extensive enough, loss of revenue.

With the extent of golf course vandalism and the potential for tremendous losses, one would think the golf business would be security and prevention conscious. Such is not always the case. A quick review of the literature on golf course construction and management shows almost no mention of vandalism prevention.

### Build barriers

As already mentioned, turf and green

damage is one of the most devastating of property destruction. Most of this is done by automobile or golf cars, although some is done by motorcycles and by persons on foot. In the case of the automobile, accessibility control is the answer. Whether this is accomplished by fence or other means, access by automobile must be limited to prescribed entranceways. For practical, economical, or aesthetic reasons, a fence is not always desirable. Strategically placed posts, trees, or shrub lines can serve the same purpose. Rows of prickly shrubs along the outer perimeter can also serve to limit motorcycle and pedestrian traffic if planted sufficiently close together. Multiflora roses or barberry bushes are excellent for this type of planting.

If an open appearance is desired, automobile restriction can still be accomplished by edging the course with a drainage ditch or mound of earth. These barriers must be of adequate width or length to make it impossible to maneuver over or around them.

Even if no other area is protected, it is essential to block access to greens that lie adjacent to a roadway, particularly those that are at the corner of intersecting streets. These are the

most vulnerable.

A fence, if used, can itself become a target of vandals. The extent of this vandalism may depend on the type of fencing used. To minimize intentionally inflicted damage, a fence should have three features: it should be difficult if not impossible to climb, it should be see-through and, if boards or rails are used, they should be placed vertically instead of horizontally. The unclimbable feature is not only to keep out trespassers but to prevent damage to the fence itself from persons climbing on or over it. Vertical boards and rails also discourage climbing or sitting on the fence. It should be see-through to allow the curious to view the property without climbing. This visibility also allows the police to inspect the property and to see vehicles or persons during restricted hours.

### Cooperate with cops

In conjunction with police visibility, it is important to keep the local law enforcement agency informed of your operations. Let them know when you are going to be mowing or watering at night. Let them know also when no one is supposed to be on the course. This will serve as a reminder to the of-

ficers and encourage them to check out anyone they may see. Tell them, also, when a vehicle will be parked overnight in the parking lot because of car trouble or any other reason. If you do not, they may become accustomed to cars in the lot and overlook an intruder.

Most law enforcement agencies are beginning to place more emphasis on crime prevention. If your local department has a crime prevention unit, it can be a source of assistance for your prevention needs. Give them a call and let them do a security survey of your operation.

One of the items they will surely mention is good lighting. Not only does good lighting cut down on burglaries, but it also lessens the amount of vandalism. The clubhouse, maintenance buildings, and parking lots should all be lighted as should any other trouble spots. Lights themselves can be damaged by rocks, slingshots, and pellet guns. These can be protected by using screening or by substituting durable plastic for the glass.

Next to turf damage, the greatest amount of dollar loss occurs to equipment left sitting out either at night, during the off season, or in a remote area of the course. Construction and maintenance equipment is just too inviting to be left sitting out. Have your employees take those few extra minutes at the end of the day to put their equipment away. If you have no facilities for storing a piece of heavy equipment, at least park it in a well-lit area. Attention should not only be given to large equipment. A sand rake or shovel left lying about can turn into a tool of destruction when applied to a green.

When vandalism does occur, and it will no matter how many precautions you take, there are several steps that you should follow. First of all, you should notify the police. Even if you are not going to make an insurance claim or even if you do not want to make an official report, still notify them. They can't help you with prevention unless they know there is a problem. Secondly, repair the damage as quickly as possible. Not only will this maintain the neat appearance of your facilities, but damage left unrepaired often fosters further

destruction. Third, try to analyze the vandalism. Analyze it not so much as to what motivated the vandals (the experts can't even do that), but as to what you could have done to reduce the risk.

Ask yourself these questions: How was the damage done? How did they gain access? Was the area well lit? Could the damaged property have been constructed so as to resist this damage? When you have the answers to these questions then take steps to prevent the recurrence of the same type of destruction.

#### **Who's responsible for what?**

It is important to have someone associated with the management of the golf course directly responsible for this analysis of damage and for the prevention of all vandalism. If responsibility is not fixed, it probably won't get done. The same person can be responsible for other types of security and prevention of other kinds of crime such as burglary. Unless your problem is extensive, this does not need to be a full-time position. It can be assigned as additional duties for one of the present management staff. The following are some specific vandalism prevention areas for your new security specialist to look at in addition to those previously mentioned:

**Drinking fountains.** Outdoor drinking fountains should be metal and not ceramic.

**Flags.** Golf course flags are a favorite room decoration. A determined thief will obtain even the most securely fastened flag, but a spur-of-the-moment thief can be deterred by a securely fastened and difficult-to-remove flag. Some golf course operators have found it necessary to remove the flags and poles each night. They should definitely be removed during any extended period when the course is closed.

**Golf ball washers.** These should be securely fastened to a fixed object and not placed in remote areas of the course.

**Golf cars.** These should be placed in-

side at night. During playing hours unused cars should be parked within sight of an employee. Keep the keys in the building and not in the cars.

**Gratings.** Drainage gratings should be secured so that they cannot be lifted out without a special tool or key. This will prevent not only damage or loss of the grating but prevent drains from being stopped up. It may also prevent a law suit resulting from someone stepping into an open drain.

**Ground lights.** These should be cast iron and securely anchored in cement.

**Rain spouts and exposed water pipe.** These should be cast iron instead of asbestos or plastic. Better yet, they can be concealed within the building's construction or buried beneath the ground.

**Roofs.** Access to roofs should be limited. Check all buildings to see if flower bed walls, entranceway covers, or other features make it easy to climb onto the roof. Many times material stored next to the maintenance building makes for easy access to that roof.

**Signs.** The closer to the ground the sign, the more damage that will occur. Durable plastic or vandal proof glass is preferable to regular glass. If applied letters are used they should be securely anchored or placed flush with the wall or material on which they are mounted.

**Tee benches.** Tee benches should be securely anchored in cement or of sufficient weight to resist movement.

**Trees.** New plantings of young trees are particularly susceptible to vandalism. They should be supported by a sturdy post that reaches at least to the top of the small tree. The more mature a tree is when planted, the less likely it is to be damaged. □