It’s been one heck of a winter. Record cold, the polar vortex and large amounts of ice have created a challenge for superintendents as they prepare for course openings. But what is waiting under the ice?

A recent USGA webinar on winter injury brought together a panel of experts, including Bob Vavrek (senior agronomist, North-Central Region), Bud White (director, Mid-Continent Region), Jim Skorulski (senior agronomist, Northeast Region), Patrick O’Brien (director, Southeast Region) and Darin Bevard (director, Mid-Atlantic Region).

Each of the experts chimed in about the main concerns superintendents will face as winter finally ends.

“It’s probably been the most difficult winter in perhaps 20 to 30 years. We still don’t know how much damage we are going to get. There is some confirmed injury to greens in the Detroit area. I’ve sampled and seen some damage to Poa annua in the Chicago area and other reports are coming in about damage,” says Vavrek.

The bizarre winter weather not only hit those in the north, but also in Texas where White saw an extreme flux in temperature day to day.

“We’ve had such extreme swings. We have had five different times where the temperature has dropped 40 degrees or more from one afternoon to the (next) morning. Almost all of those times the bermudagrass was starting to green up some,” says White.

To say that this winter has been unusual seems to be an understatement. “I think for the U.S. as a whole they say this is the coldest six-month period since 1912,” says Brevard.

The question now is, what will superintendents face this spring? The panel discussed practices such as the use of blankets on greens that could reduce winter injury. However, now it seems that turf managers will have to wait to see what the damage is. “The combination of the cold temperatures and the ice coverage, I think it’s going to be a one-two punch for many golf courses,” says Vavrek.

The webinar is still available online. To view it, visit https://www4.goto-meeting.com/register/589258767.
Penn Staters talk winter injury on Golfdom TV

Golfdom TV recently caught up with two Penn State turf experts on the golf course, Dr. Mike Fidanza and Dr. John Kaminski. Though it was warm on the course in Florida, the conversation turned to winter injury concerns. "I think this is the toughest winter I’ve seen ever," says Kaminski.

With such a harsh winter, the two Ph.D.s each discussed what superintendents may face as the ice clears. “Everyone’s pretty scared about it right now. I think anybody with Poa is probably going to have some issues...I think it’s going to be okay, but there’s going to be a few people that are going to be hit pretty hard," says Kaminski.

Fidanza says it will be interesting to see how this winter will impact the cold tolerant bermudagrasses that are beginning to be seen in the Mid-Atlantic region and the transition zone. “Coming through the winter, areas that are covered in snow and potentially ice, we’ll keep an eye on these. See how cold tolerant they really are,” says Fidanza.

To view the two short videos and hear what these experts have to say on winter injury, visit golfdom.com/video.

The program has done well, but they have to find a new name. Are they regional managers? Regional association specialists? Introducing them just doesn’t sound right.”