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for plant health. They have implemented yearlong plans to make turf more vigorous to tolerate stress better.

Of course, a major part of their plant health goals are their fungicide programs. Gurke and the others just don’t just spray away when a turf disease rears its ugly head. Their fungicide programs are deeply rooted in various factors, from a course’s history to a course’s microclimate to a chemical’s efficacy to a course’s maintenance budget.

The latter is a huge factor these days, considering the weak golf economy. According to a recent Golfdom survey of nearly 600 superintendents, 65 percent said they cut their maintenance budgets in 2009. When those superintendents were asked to cite the categories they cut to reduce their budgets, 42 percent said pesticide applications. That was the third choice after labor (92 percent) and fertilizer applications (55 percent). However, when the same superintendents were asked: In order, rank the areas of your budget you’re most likely to cut if asked to do so, only 4 percent said they would be “most likely” to cut pesticides.

According to a Golfdom survey last year on fungicide use, more than half of 350 respondents said budget constraints were impacting their choice of fungicides in 2009. Dan Walter, superintendent of Blue Ash (Ohio) Golf Course, says the first thing he thinks about with his annual fungicide program is his budget.

“That has become more of an issue the past few years,” Walter adds.

Hence, Walter says he orders most of his pesticides early to take advantage of companies’ early-season selling programs.

Even if superintendents don’t purchase their products earlier, they should develop their fungicide action plans early in the golf season, says turfgrass pathologist Barb Corwin, owner of Turfgrass Diagnostics LLC in Hallsville, Mo. It’s not just a matter of good economics to have a solid fungicide plan in place. It’s simply good planning, Corwin says.

“You’d be surprised at how many superintendents don’t have plans in place,” she adds.

Having a grand plan

Tom Athy, the certified superintendent of Omaha (Neb.) Country Club, says he learned the importance of planning long ago. As part of a solid fungicide plan, it’s important to understand the different chemical classes and their modes of action, Athy says. They also need to understand the microclimates on their courses, which could impact disease and control.

Corwin stresses the importance of disease identification in a fungicide program and choosing the proper product to treat disease.

“The No.1 thing is superintendents need to make sure they know what disease they need to control,” Corwin says. “Disease identification should be at the top of their lists.”

That’s because it’s often not a disease that superintendents might be treating. It may be a physical injury, such as bruising to the turf.

If it’s a disease, superintendents need to know what fungicides are available to treat it, Corwin says. If the disease is brown patch, there are several fungicides with different active ingredients labeled to treat it.

Once a fungicide is chosen to treat the disease, it’s vital that superintendents know the spray volume and application rate.

“If I’m not walking that course every day . . . I don’t have a real good grip on whether I’m doing a good job or not.”

JOHN GURKE
nozzle type for droplet size in which to apply it. “For fairy ring, for example, the fungicide needs to be placed in the upper inch or so of the soil profile,” Corwin says. 

Corwin notes the importance of proper application overall. “Make sure you have the right spray volumes and nozzles, so the fungicide is applied correctly,” she says.

Superintendents should never make assumptions about disease or what fungicide should be sprayed to control it. They need to practice certainty in these cases. “There are diseases that can take superintendents by surprise,” Corwin says.

Corwin also doesn’t believe a turf disease will hit 18 greens simultaneously or within a few days, what with the difference in air movement, shade and other factors on greens. Hence, she has never subscribed to the thinking that all 18 greens be treated for dollar spot even if only one of the greens gets the disease. But Corwin admits she has met opposition from superintendents on this matter, and she understands where they’re coming from.

“Superintendents sleep better if they go out and put fungicide on all 18 greens,” she says. “They don’t want to take the risk.”

Spin control
There’s also the matter of rotation in a fungicide program, which Gurke says is elementary to a solid fungicide program. Superintendents must rotate fungicides so certain turf diseases won’t become resistant to them.

There’s a method to the madness when it comes to the practice. Experienced superintendents realize there are vital components to consider in fungicide rotation. Gurke says his turf disease challenges have more to do with anthracnose and brown patch. So his challenge there is to find a reliable rotation of products to thwart off those diseases.

Gurke says his rotation program differs from greens to tees to fairways. The fungicides most prone to resistance are the ones he uses the least. “I might use them once or twice a season,” Gurke says. “I rotate around the chemis-

DOWN WITH DISEASE
Superintendents take various approaches to managing disease on cool-season turf

By John Walsh, Contributing Editor

Whether it’s dollar spot, anthracnose, snow mold, brown patch or pythium, golf course superintendents have their own ways of combating these diseases. Budgets and the uniqueness of each course are significant factors.

Dollar spot is one disease Jeff Corcoran — along with many other superintendents managing cool-season turf — deals with annually. “Once it takes hold, you’re always chasing it weekly,” says the manager of golf courses and grounds at the private, 36-hole Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y. “A good preventive plan is better because you end up using less product. We take a preventive approach. However, we can take a curative approach in the fall because the weather doesn’t favor dollar spot as much then, and the disease doesn’t cause any significant damage.”

Scott Brickley has attacked dollar spot in the spring with boscalid with great success. The golf course superintendent at the public, 18-hole Bunker Hill Golf Course in Medina, Ohio, applies it only once in the spring, and that typically gets him through the year. “We might get a small outbreak in the fall, but we can accept that,” he says.

Ted Cox combats dollar spot on bentgrass/Poa annua greens with a preventive program. The superintendent at Scott Brickley discovered a successful program to combat dollar spot at his Ohio course.
tries apt to cause resistance.”

On the other hand, Gurke uses the fungicides least prone to resistance most, such as chlorothalonil, which he says offers strong contact control of several turf diseases.

Gurke never tank mixes the same systemic products from one spray to the next. He also avoids using DMIs from July through mid-August.

“They can get a little hot and cause some phytotoxicity,” he says.

Gurke also believes resistance is less apt to occur if fungicides are sprayed at longer intervals. Ten applications of the same product will not be at risk of resistance as much as 20 applications.

“If you’re spraying every two weeks between applications regardless of conditions, you’re setting yourself up for resistance more than if you’re spraying every three to four weeks,” he says.

Walter says chlorothalonil has become the cornerstone of his fungicide program. Walter witnessed resistant strains of dollar spot on his course’s fairways in 1996. He sprayed propiconizole at the highest rate at three-week intervals, which led to the resistance. Walter then had to eliminate a few fungicides from his rotation.

At the time, Walter also began using chlorothalonil, known to offset resistance better than other fungicides. He uses it every two weeks on fairways and greens.

Walter also tracks his fungicide use from a contact and systemic approach. Contact fungicides control disease by the public, 36-hole Running Fox Golf Course in Chillicothe, Ohio, applies propiconazole in spring and alternates chlorothalonil and iprodione throughout the summer.

“Every now and then dollar spot gets ahead of me, so I use a higher rate of what I already use,” he says.

Weather is a big factor that determines how Bill Hamilton treats dollar spot, which isn’t a significant problem for him. If Hamilton, the superintendent at the 36-hole Silverado Country Club and Resort in Napa, Calif., sees a couple of patches of dollar spot, he looks at the weather report, which will determine whether he’ll apply a fungicide.

“In the past, I’ve taken a cup cutter and removed dollar spot without applying a fungicide,” he says.

Brickley had a problem with anthracnose when he arrived at Bunker Hill 15 years ago. He learned what greens were susceptible, then removed trees to open up air movement and created programs to combat anthracnose. Originally, he used thiophante methyl, a curative fungicide. Then he changed the program to more of a preventive one — more of a summer stress program — that includes chlorothalonil and fosetyl-aluminum. Now, anthracnose is a secondary disease.

More than dollar spot or anthracnose, Hamilton’s main concern disease wise is snow mold. With the wet northern California weather, snow mold rears its ugly head regularly.

The one PCNB application is enough for the year if the winter is fairly dry. If the winter is wet, Hamilton retreats the greens and tees and with iprodione, fludioxonil or polyoxin D zinc salt once a month through March, or even into April, because the weather still can be cold and damp then.

“Snow mold will do its thing regardless of the turf’s health,” he says.

Hamilton says he has no problems with summer diseases. He’ll get Waitea patch in the spring occasionally and take a curative approach. “We can see it coming because all my guys know how to scout,” he says.

On top of that, Waitea patch cleans up easily, Hamilton says. “It’s more of an aesthetic problem to me,” he says.

Walsh is a contributing editor to Golfdom.

Scott Kincaid (left) and Dan Walter of Blue Ash Golf Course have put a lot of thought into their fungicide program over the years.

A good preventive plan is the best way to control dollar spot in the summer, says Jeff Corcoran.
“Superintendents need to make sure they know what diseases they need to control. Disease identification should be at the top of their lists.”

BARB CORWIN

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Plant Health Report | PART TWO

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You’ve got enough to worry about. But Insignia® fungicide can give you up to 28 worry-free days — at least when it comes to preventing key turf diseases. That’s how long research shows Insignia can prevent brown patch, pythium root rot, fairy ring, take-all patch, gray leaf spot and more. Which will give you plenty of time to tackle the other 100 job demands being thrown your way.

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Culturally speaking

While Athy doesn’t take fungicides for granted, he doesn’t hang his hat on them to control disease and other pests. He realizes the importance of sound cultural practices, especially when it comes to irrigation, to also control disease. He watches closely the correct time to water and how much to water, depending on the time of year. He’s always monitoring leaf wetness.

Athy says fairway topdressing has helped control disease. He admits he thought fairway topdressing was “excessive” when he began the program a few years ago. “But I saw the benefit of it after one year,” he says. “And since we have the money to do it, I think it’s a great tool to help keep the fairways dry, which cuts down on disease pressure.”

Of course, cultural practices such as irrigation, aerification and fertility have their own set of methods for mastering. Just ask Gurke.

To offset injury on greens, Gurke has cut back on mowing. But knowing he still has to keep greens fast, Gurke is rolling them more often, which has also enabled him to raise the height of cut. He spoon-feeds the greens with one-tenth a pound of nitrogen every few weeks to help keep them growing.

Gurke believes most disease outbreaks happen not as a result of not being protected by fungicide, but because turf is in poor physiological condition. Gurke says superintendents are often their own worst enemies when it comes to plant health.

“We put sand on one-tenth of an inch of grass and then brush it around in 85-degree weather,” he says. “That’s not the smartest thing to do to keep turf healthy.”

Walter has introduced several cultural practices, including topdressing and verticutting for thatch removal. He and his crew core aerify twice a year and deep-tine aerify three times a year during the summer months. Walter has also increased nitrogen fertility steadily for the past five years and applies nitrogen every seven days on greens at a half-pound an acre. “I did get lean there for awhile when the trend was to go with less nitrogen,” he says. “But that came back to bite me because dollar spot became worse.”

Lasting advice

Athy, who has been a superintendent for 30 years, knows a lot of things about a lot of things, especially fungicide programs.

“A lot of the knowledge I have came from the school of hard knocks,” Athy says. “You learn from experience — what works and what doesn’t work.”

For instance, Athy advises younger superintendents to take it slow with new fungicides while they’re breaking them into their programs. “It’s important to get a feel for how they perform,” he says.

Gurke is big on keeping spraying records and using them. He keeps notes about good things and bad. For a superintendent who’s starting a job at a new course, “there’s no better starting point than history,” Gurke says.

Of course, it all depends on why the new superintendent is there and whom he or she is replacing.

If the new person is replacing someone who retired after 30 years and was adored by members because he or she had the best greens in town, then the new superintendent should probably stay with the old person’s program, Gurke says. If the new person is replacing someone who was fired because of poor conditions, then the new superintendent may want to start at square one with a new fungicide program. But even then it wouldn’t hurt to glance at the previous person’s records to figure out what went wrong and if products were overused and resistance became a problem.

It’s just another part of getting with the fungicide program.
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-Walter Voorhees, Standard Golf Founder

For 100 years, we've been proud to keep Walter's vision alive. Today, we celebrate a century of solutions that help you get the job done, day after day.
It was too much of a risk, Genevieve Rack thought. Making this deal could imperil the family business.

So “Gen,” as family and friends called her, cast her vote “no” for the family business to put up the financially stable golf course it owned near Pittsburgh as collateral to purchase a financially troubled golf course near Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It just didn’t make sense to Gen to mess with a good thing.

The Rack family had owned and operated 7 Springs Golf Course, an 18-hole public track near Pittsburgh, for nearly 30 years. It was 1985 and business was solid there. Several members of the family worked at 7 Springs and lived decent lives. Gen didn’t see why the family should jeopardize a business it had worked so hard to maintain.

Gen’s husband, Eddie Rack, was a member of the Florida course, the 36-hole Colony West Country Club in Tamarac, Fla., that was for sale. He was approached about buying it when the club was near bankruptcy.

The Racks, who were in their 60s at the time, lived in Fort Lauderdale during the winter and trusted 7 Springs to their children, Janice Sherman and Norman Rack, who also had their kids working at the course. The Colony West members approached Rack about buying

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