

Water Shortages Could Handicap Golf

While there may be no water shortage problem in the Middle Atlantic this summer, people concerned with golf course maintenance are not forgetting past shortages and threats that lurk in the future.

John C. Walker III, president of the Columbia Country Club, sounded an alarm at a dinner of Middle Atlantic PGA professionals and their club presidents.

"Water is a precious commodity essential to sustaining a golf course," he told them. "Severe restrictions have been imposed in New Jersey this year and in our area in the past."

While Columbia, in close-in Chevy Chase, is one of a few clubs buying water from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, Walker pointed out that restrictions could apply equally to all clubs, including those with water supplied by wells, lakes and streams.

"Whether you have private or public water," he warned club presidents, "in the event of a severe shortage, you could lose your greens and tees. No golf."

He said he hoped some solutions might be found that might exempt at least greens and tees from restrictions or allow storage of water for emergencies.

WSSC and county inspectors work closely and in time of emergency the county usually applies to all water users the same restrictions WSSC puts on its customers.

As an example, Bretton Woods, which pumps water from a lake on its 17th hole, had to get permission during a recent shortage to draw water from the Potomac River.

Bill Black, Congressional CC's manager of greens and grounds, said he is learning to get along with less water on fairways even though the club normally has adequate water available from two large lakes to take care of its two 18-hole courses.

Several points about what may lie ahead are made in articles in the current issue of "Golf Course Management," published by the Golf Course Superintendents Association.

- Use of undrinkable and effluent water may become standard.

- The cost of water, which has been underpriced, may some day approach the cost of gasoline.

- Golf club members may have to lower their standards and accept a course that is not as green as they have been accustomed to, like most of the British courses. Brown fairways, for instance. Watering of fairways is relatively new.

There are some, like Silver Spring's Eddie Ault, golf course architect and turf expert, who feel that too much watering goes on and that fairways are better off if they are kept "hungry."

"When you don't water, the weak grasses die and the strong ones survive," Ault said. "Then you can overseed the fall and have good strong turf."

The Musser International Turfgrass Foundation, run by Dr. Fred V. Grau in College Park, is helping finance a fellowship at Texas A&M for graduate research on water stress on turf to determine what makes a grass more drought tolerant, and to find grasses which require a minimum of water and other maintenance.

A big step forward was taken 30 years ago when Grau then head of the USGA Green Section and based at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's turfgrass research facility in Beltsville, helped develop and promote Meyer Zoysia, a durable grass requiring less water and maintenance than the traditional grasses.

Now a new Zoysia grass that spreads faster than Meyer Zoysia has been developed and was shown to members of the turfgrass industries at a Beltsville Field Day this week.

The Maryland Turfgrass Council is deeply concerned about the water problem. It has asked Dr. Grau to collect published papers on ways to conserve water in turfgrass maintenance.

Water problems will also highlight the Council's annual educational conference, Turfgrass 81, at the Baltimore Convention Center next January 4-6.

It is also financing a promotional campaign to save the University of Maryland's Institute of Applied Agriculture, which has produced many of the area's leading course superintendents. The Institute has been hit by the state's economy program and will be phased out unless new funds are found.

By Joe Gambatese

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