

What Drought?!

Dean Graves, Government Relations Chairman

Upon being appointed the Government Relations Chairman for the MAAGCS it has been proven multiple times that government feels a necessity to regulate our industry. It is likely that most industries, as well as ours, are confronted with more stringent and numerous regulatory hoops to pass through during each day of operations.

Last summer during the heat, drought, and mandatory restrictions, Mr. Chris Ayers and myself had numerous meetings with the Maryland Department of Environment. It was quickly realized that the MDE knew very little about the management of a golf course. They did not know the difference between syringe and the tax revenue production by golf courses. They thought a golf course property of 150 acres had 150 acres of fairways. Chris and I realized that the regulators needed to be educated about the agronomics, as well as, the revenue generated of golf courses.

A survey was quickly produced and distributed to the membership asking questions about acreage, staffing, fairway size, water source, etc. This was turned around with a letter to the MDE compiling all required information to educate the regulators about what we do and why we need water to survive. Shortly after these efforts the drought ended in early September with about a month of rain.

Once the autumn got under way, the MAAGCS sent a letter to the MDE recommending a meeting. On the agenda was a suggestion that we discuss a viable plan for water restrictions now during a time of no water restrictions. We also submitted what we thought was a very equitable plan for the golf course industry to abide by and be good stewards of the environment.

During December and January, MDE meetings convened with education as our goal. We had a great opportunity to sit face to face with regulators and explain to them what we do and how we do it. The MDE wanted to learn and listened attentively to our wants and needs.

Meanwhile, Governor Glendening gave an executive order to develop a Drought Regulation Task Force Committee. The goal was to produce regulations that the public and industry must follow during the next drought whenever that may occur.

Initially, I was not appointed to the Task Force. With the help of Mr. John Shields and our lobbyist, Maxine Adler, I was placed on the committee representing the golf course industry.

Our first meeting was held one rainy May afternoon at the MDE's facility in Baltimore. It consisted of people representing WSSC, Audubon, the car wash industry, public health, Susquehanna Water Authority, Council of Cities, Maryland State Legislature, garden centers, farming, and Sierra Club. It was quite apparent that there were many needs to be considered from this wide spectrum of people with varied interests. My biggest worry was, how would a non-essential water user like golf courses receive its fair share.

The May meeting was very informal with a simple goal of educating each other and what respective requirements were necessary during a drought situation. The MDE deciphered our needs carefully.

The following meeting in June focused on the varying water sources in the state. The Eastern portion receives a vast majority of its water from wells and small municipal water suppliers. The central section of the state relies upon relatively huge supplies such as WSSC and Baltimore city. The western third depends on a mixture of individual wells, reservoirs, and municipal purification. Not only does everybody have different needs; consider the differing weather, soils, and sources.

The July meeting started with a culmination of information and specific recommendations presented by the MDE.

- ♦ Water tees and greens between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.
- ♦ Syringe heat-sensitive grasses during daytime stress periods at the minimum rate necessary.
- ♦ As part of a necessary overseeding or resodding operation during the months of September and October at the minimum rate necessary. Sources of water other than potable water should be used when available.

With this regulation no fairway irrigation would be allowed. This meant golf courses would have water restrictions of up to 90 percent. This would be disastrous to the golf course industry. After some personal conversations with committee Chairman Robert Swann and lead MDE representatives the following was created:

- ♦ To water tees and greens between the hours of 8 p.m.- 8 a.m.
- ♦ To water fairways when a 30% reduction plan is in effect.
- ♦ As part of a necessary overseeding or resodding operation during the months of September and October at the minimum rate necessary. Sources of water other than potable water should be used when available.

The addition of hand and sprinkler watering with a hose is being requested.

The information will be presented to Governor Glendening within the next few months. Hopefully, he will not alter our well throughout recommendations.

It has been exciting representing the MAAGCS during these meetings. I feel that our regulators want and need to be educated. It is our responsibility to educate them so they can make the correct decisions for us.

Keep accurate records of irrigation quantities used on greens, tees, fairways, and rough. This information will be necessary to justify allowed quantities during future restrictions.

Please Remember to Vote November 7, 2000

The MAAGCS monthly meeting has been re-scheduled to the *first Tuesday* in the month of November because of the Virginia Turfgrass Conference in Virginia Beach, VA. We are aware that this is National Election Day. The meeting at Whiskey Creek Golf Club will be a lunch meeting. Please make your plans accordingly!