

A Cut Above

A Check System For Improving Mowing Turf Quality

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Spring and early summer bring ideal grass growing weather, and golfers expect to play a perfectly manicured golf course. There is frequently so much to do and not enough time, people, or machines available to get it all done! Here are some suggestions for developing a check system to monitor the maintenance operation and improve turf quality during the summer:

The Check System Check Golfer Expectations

- Try to develop a consensus of opinion regarding golfer expectations and preference for mowing heights. Lower handicap players tend to prefer low mowed fairways while higher handicap players tend to prefer higher mowed fairways. There will never be 100% agreement but a little discussion and consensus building go along way for success.
- Develop maintenance standards with owner, green committee, or club officials at your course. This document will provide everyone with standards for the mowing height and frequency on greens, tees, fairways, and rough. Tying the maintenance standards to the available budget, labor and equipment will help meet golfer expectations.
- Communicate with golfers frequently. Find out ways to get feed back from their perspective on the course. One good way to do this is to golf with members weekly or monthly. Another way is to enlist the aid of the PGA shop team and maintenance personnel about what they are hearing. Checking with the golf shop staff on a daily basis provides the best results, but weekly checkups will work. Don't go longer than week without talking with the golf shop staff. They have the most direct contact with golfers, and their feedback is critical.
- Put what you hear into action. Two way communications are crucial for success in mowing. A bulletin board with golf related topics along with

maintenance updates posted near the golf shop works well. Communicate directly with those who have offered suggestions or criticism concerning actions taken and results seen. Perception is 90% of reality for most people.

The Check System Maintenance Operations

- The best mowing quality comes from sharp well-adjusted mowers. Neglect mower sharpening and adjustment at your peril! Look sharp and be sharp!



- Recheck sharpness and mower adjustment after sanding or any activity that may affect mower cutting ability. Have two sets of reels on hand, so the mechanic can maintain mower quality and machines have a minimum of down time.
- Dry grass results in the best cut. If you can't mow the fairways or rough in the afternoon due to play, drag dew and grass clumps in the morning with old garden hoses or chains. Once you get the hang of this procedure, it does not take more than an hour or two to dry off all your fairways.
- Attach static or powered brushes to the front of your fairway units. This is a great way to improve mowing quality and remove water. For this to be successful operators MUST frequently check to insure brushes are working. It

is a good idea to keep four or five sets of bands in the mower cab so operators can make repairs in the field if bands break while mowing.

- Train operators concerning cleaning cutting unit rollers. A little bit of grass build up causes significant changes in the mowing height. If roller cleaning needs to be done frequently during mowing, this may be an indication that mowing frequency needs to be increased to reduce the amount of clippings.
- Clean up grass clumps after every mowing using a hose or chain drags. Although noisy, a blower or vacuum will work best if you have one.
- Talk with your mower operators and mechanics to establish guidelines for proper mower performance and what operators should do if mowers malfunction in the field. A little bit of training and education can save a lot of problems. This is also a great way to build teamwork and communication.
- Get your mechanic out on the golf course periodically to check mower performance in the field. This is a great opportunity for the superintendent and the mechanic to compare notes concerning their mowing quality expectations. Better yet, follow right behind a mower for on the scenes real (or reel) time assessment.

The Check System Observe for Success

- All the pieces are in place. Check daily with your operators, mechanics, and golfers to see how everything is going. Fix what needs fixing. Improve on what you are doing well.
- Continue to observe course conditions and listen to golfer comments. Also check yourself by training your assistant, mechanic, green committee chairman, director of golf or whomever you can trust to also provide feedback. There can never be too many eyes and ears on the course.