

Getting the most from your golf course during tough economic times

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Southwest Region, USGA Green Section

December 2003

The California economy has negatively affected the golf business during the past year. Earlier, we heard of a Sacramento golf course that was sold and is to be converted into a housing development. This week, we learned of two more golf courses in Sacramento that were closed due to low play and declining revenues. Most courses in the southwest have reported a 5% to 15% decline in rounds and revenues during the past year. The real world consequences of the economic slump are felt throughout the region, and the effects on employees and families are especially difficult during the holiday season.

To deal with these tough economic times, superintendents and managers are looking for ways to trim the budget while continuing to meet the high expectations of golfers. The following list highlights a few ideas to help streamline operations while maintaining acceptable course quality:

Labor and water are usually the two biggest budget items in the southwest. Spend some time evaluating maintenance priorities to see if adjustments are

possible in the maintenance schedule. Creative scheduling can eliminate overtime while helping to maintain acceptable course quality. Also look for opportunities to reduce irrigation in out of play areas as a way to save additional money.

Focus maintenance procedures in primary playing areas, e.g. greens, fairways, and tees, with less emphasis on rough, bunkers and out of play areas.

Perform an audit of the irrigation system to insure that water is not wasted and that the system is running efficiently. Look for signs of nozzle wear, recurring leaks, and chronic problems with wet spots and dry areas. A useful exercise is to perform a catch can test to evaluate water distribution uniformity.

Assess the expertise of the staff and consider cross training employees to expand productivity.

Keep equipment in top condition at all times and take steps to train mechanics and employees on preventive maintenance techniques that can help reduce breakdowns and costly repairs.

Experiment with new mowing patterns that improve labor efficiency and possibly reduce equipment wear. One golf course found that changing the mowing pattern on tees resulted in 25% less time for

mowing and a 40% savings in equipment repair for the replacement of bearings.

Evaluate high visual impact areas, such as the course entry and first tee area, to see if improvements can be made at little or no cost.

You should also plan to attend one of our USGA Regional Conferences during the coming months to gather additional ideas to streamline your maintenance operation. These conferences provide a great opportunity to meet with industry experts and colleagues in your region and share ideas on efficient maintenance practices. Here are the USGA Regional Meetings scheduled in the southwest:

March 15, 2004

Northern California Regional Conference

Castlewood Country Club
Pleasanton, California

March 24, 2004

Arizona Regional Conference

Phoenix Country Club
Phoenix, Arizona

We thank you for your continued support this past year, and extend our warmest wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a brighter outlook for 2004.

APHIS expands biotechnology enforcement

This fall, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service announced plans to establish a unit of its Biotechnology Regulatory Services dedicated to compliance and enforcement.

The BRS is responsible for regulating the introduction of genetically engineered organisms such as plants, insects, microorganisms and any other organism that is known to be, or could be, a plant pest. Among them are a number of genetically engineered turfgrasses.

Not only is it charged with developing science-based protocols to ensure safe field testing, but also with developing measures to keep infractions from occurring in the first place. The agency is expanding its compliance and enforcement program in order to accomplish both of these goals and to protect American agriculture, the food supply, and the environment.

BRS determines the conditions under which genetically engineered organisms can be introduced into the United States. It allows for the importation, interstate movement and field release of these materials only after rigorous conditions and safeguards are put into place. Under the authority of the Plant Protection Act of 2000, failure to adhere to the regulations, permit conditions and requirements can result in serious penalties.

Given the growing scope and complexity of biotechnology, APHIS has recognized the need for more safeguards and greater transparency of the regulatory process. This need is echoed by the biotech industry, stakeholders and consumers.

Compliance specialists with the new unit will use set criteria to thoroughly evaluate all potential compliance infractions. They, as well as APHIS inspectors, will also perform targeted inspections of field tests. Depending on the

genetically engineered crop being tested, a site may be inspected by APHIS at least five times during a single growing season to ensure that the conditions set forth are carefully followed.

Of the 7,402 field tests APHIS regulated from 1990 to 2001, less than two percent resulted in compliance infractions.

Nonetheless, BRS continues working to strengthen our oversight and inspection of GE field tests. Compliance is, and will always be, the highest priority. In addition, as science progresses, BRS will develop any regulations necessary to meet the challenges posed by this new science while continuing to safeguard American agriculture, the food supply, and the environment.

For more, including a frequently asked questions list, visit:

www.aphis.usda.gov/brscompliance.html

Tips from the USGA

Frost, Firewood, and Winter Putting Conditions

USGA Green Section
December 2003

Fall is upon us and while most northern courses are preparing to close down, southern courses are growing in their winter overseeding. In either case, everyone will soon be hearing those famous fall and winter comments of "What do you mean we can't tee off until 9:30 a.m.?" "Can't you just turn the sprinklers on and melt the frost?"

"But the thermometer at the bank down the street said 36 degrees... that's not freezing?"

Yes, it's the frost season again. It is sad but true that many golfers do not understand the importance of greens being allowed to thaw before play begins and, even

worse, do not appreciate the long-term consequences caused by placing concentrated traffic on turf that is not actively growing. We often attempt to explain in technical terms how cell walls and tissue are destroyed by sharp ice crystals when the weight of a golfer or mower is placed on the frozen plant. We tell players how cooler soil temperatures limit plant growth, hindering recovery from

traffic damage and opening the door for Poa annua invasion, in even the warmest winter climates. Unfortunately, we often feel these explanations fall on deaf ears.

Knowing that turfgrass leaves are primarily composed of water, it should then be easy to understand that the entire

plant (internally and externally) can

freeze rapidly when temperatures drop. Maybe an analogy that golfers could more easily understand would be to compare the leaf of a grass plant to a paper straw filled with water. A frosted leaf would be similar to freezing the water

in the straw, while a "thawed" version would contain melted water. If you were to take the two (side by side) and bend them, the frozen straw would break and damage the "tissue" (the paper of the straw), while unfrozen example would flex unharmed.

The frost season is a great time to encourage cutting some firewood to warm your greens.

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STATE UPDATE

California DPR Increases Pesticide Fees

The Dept. of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) issued an emergency rule, effective Jan. 1, 2004, to increase a variety of pesticide license registration and renewal fees as well as the mill assessment rate on the sale of registered pesticide products. A new state law requires DPR to become primarily a fee-based funded agency. Most funding of DPR programs will now come from pesticide registrations, professional licenses and the mill fee, rather than the state's General Fund. The law allows DPR to modify fees for professional licenses by regula-

tion rather than being set by statute. The new fees apply to licenses that will be in effect during calendar year 2004. DPR can now charge fees for various activities related to its licensing program including issuing separate fees for conducting exams, approving continuing education courses and issuing duplicate licensing cards. The law allows licensing and registration fees to be adjusted annually and fees must be set at levels to cover department program expenses. DPR will conduct public workshops in 2004 to look at fee restructuring for 2005.

Allied Associates

A Letter From Senator Boxer, "Saving Our Oaks"

For a decade, the majestic oak trees of California have been under attack by a disease known as "Sudden Oak Death." For almost as long, I have been working in the U.S. Senate to provide funding so that we may better understand this disease, fight its spread and protect this wonderful symbol of California.

I am pleased to let you know that the United States Senate has approved a request I made earlier this year for a total of \$5.7 million for research to stop the spread of Sudden Oak Death Syndrome, which has killed countless oak trees in Northern California. The funding comes from both the Agriculture Appropriations bill and the Interior Appropriations bill.

Sudden Oak Death was first discovered in Marin County in 1994. It has since killed many trees in California and threatens to change the landscape of California. There has been some good news in recent months, as scientists have discovered a new treatment that may slow the spread of the disease. We need to continue to expand research in pursuit of knowledge that will enable us to slow the spread of this disease, and that will lead us to find ways to prevent it from killing this significant symbol of California.

If you have questions or ideas about saving California's oaks or any other federal matter, I encourage you to send your message to <http://boxer.senate.gov/contact/webform.cfm>.

Sincerely,

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

In The News

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Vince Keats Interview

GCSANC BOD Member, **Vince Keats** of Napa Valley Country Club was interviewed at the PGA Champions Tour event at Sonoma Golf Club in Sonoma, CA. Keats shared his thoughts on the multi-faceted role of today's golf course superintendent. He also spoke about the GCSANC's involvement in allied water efforts.

Stanford Supports Good Causes

(L) GCSANC Member **Ken Williams** made sure the course was in excellent condition for the "Golf for Business and Life" event at Stanford University Golf Course. Joining Ken are (L to R) PGA of America Community Relations Director **Earnie Ellison**, Stanford's "Golf for Business and Life" Program Director **Jim Miller**, and **Kurt Uchiyama** Program Instructor.

The tournament supported two good causes, Special Olympics and Stanford's "Golf for Business and Life" program.



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Putting Conditions

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When the sun is positioned low on the horizon, long shadows cast from trees shading eastern and southern exposures have a significant impact on how early greens thaw and become playable. Golfers and club officials are probably more likely to approve the removal of trees that delay starting times than any other reason imaginable. Reducing early morning shade will not only melt frost and get players on the course earlier, but will help to maintain warmer soil temperatures improving winter and spring growth. Additionally, scientific evidence shows that early morning sunlight on greens is extremely important to grow healthy turf and deep roots. Compared with greens growing in cleared areas, those in shaded surroundings are much slower to respond in the spring and often enter summer in a weakened state.

Therefore, if your golfers are interested in getting on the course earlier in the morning and improving both winter and spring playing conditions, I have two suggestions: be patient and let the frost melt ... and cut some firewood to warm the greens.

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