

Getting the most from your golf course during tough economic times

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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 patters 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