



Maintaining Quality Conditions With Fewer Workers



Triplex mowers can increase mowing efficiency and produce excellent results.

The success of any golf facility largely depends on hiring and retaining skilled personnel that can perform a variety of maintenance tasks. Experienced personnel trained in turfgrass management are in high demand throughout the golf industry. As a result, many golf course superintendents are having difficulty attracting and retaining employees needed to produce desired course conditions from seasonal laborers to full-time managers.

In markets that are experiencing labor shortfalls, many golf facilities are being forced to raise wages and salaries to fill open positions. This can create animosity among seasoned staff members if their pay is not commensurately increased. The last thing a golf course can afford is losing a 10-year veteran because they only make 25 cents more per hour than a rookie. With labor accounting for roughly 60 percent of most golf course maintenance budgets, increasing payroll can significantly increase in expenses.

So what can golf courses do to avoid passing the increasing cost of payroll to golfers? In many cases, the answer involves improving the efficiency and focus of maintenance efforts.

Many golf courses are identifying distinct management zones that require different levels of resources. Areas that routinely come into play, such as the putting greens and fairways, are maintained at a higher level than perimeter areas, which rarely receive any action. This concept is often referred to as maintenance down the middle and can result in significant savings while causing little or no negative impact on overall playability. Establishing



naturalized areas which may only require mowing once per year and no irrigation is one example of this strategy in action.

Another approach is to do more with less. For example, many superintendents are electing to mow putting greens and tees with triplex mowers instead of walk-behind mowers. In many cases, one worker operating a triplex mower can accomplish what would normally require four workers using walk-behind mowers. Similar efficiencies can be achieved by using large rough mowers. A few golf courses have even started using robotic mowers. In the long run, the ability to mow the same amount of turf and produce the same conditions with fewer employees is often well worth the investment in new equipment.

Last but not least, more golf facilities are putting a greater emphasis on playing conditions rather than aesthetics. Abandoning intricate mowing patterns for more efficient routes that require less turning and stopping can save precious time that could be spent on tasks that improve playing conditions. For example, mowing fairways in halves is much more efficient than a striped checkerboard pattern.

The [Course Care](#) section of USGA.org offers additional solutions for golf courses facing labor constraints. For more site-specific recommendations, contact a [USGA agronomist](#) in your region.