



## More Is Less

“It hasn’t rained in weeks. I crush my best drive of the day down the center of the fairway and the ball splats into the turf then trickles backward 6 inches toward the tee. Why does the superintendent constantly overwater the course? Shouldn’t we be conserving water instead of wasting it?”

Comments like these have been addressed countless times during USGA Course Consulting Service visits. In fact, there is a good chance that someone will raise the subject of overwatered fairways whenever several golfers are present during a course tour.

There are many reasons why fairway turf might play overly soft and wet even when there has not been any recent rainfall. The cause could be inadequate surface and subsurface drainage. There may be chronic issues associated with springs or seeps that manifest after a wet year and disappear after a dry year. The issue could also be due to heavy clay soils that hold water tightly for extended periods of time. Indeed, it could also be that superintendents tend to err on the side of applying a little extra water during hot, dry weather to compensate for heavy golf cart traffic that could quickly transform moisture-stressed playing surfaces into a crisscross pattern of burned-out tire tracks.



*An antiquated, single-row sprinkler design applies the most water to the center of the fairway, which may become soggy after frequent irrigation.*



Unfortunately, golfers can be particularly unreceptive to a very common explanation for soft, wet fairways – an antiquated irrigation system. In general, irrigation systems are not upgraded at appropriate intervals and many facilities wait until catastrophic failures and extensive turf loss occurs before addressing infrastructure problems. Outdated irrigation systems that feature a basic single- or double-row pattern of fairway sprinklers will have a very tough time uniformly watering turf. The problem intensifies during a dry spell because more irrigation is necessary. Water accumulates where sprinkler coverage overlaps and these wet spots can cause plugged lies, muddy balls and frustrated golfers.

To avoid these problems, modern irrigation systems utilize multiple rows of small, individually controlled sprinklers to deliver precise amounts of water. The ability to apply water to only the turf that needs it makes it possible to produce firm fairways while keeping grass healthy. However, golfers often balk at the counterintuitive concept that more sprinklers are required to apply less water, not to mention the sticker shock of a new irrigation system. Consequently, irrigation upgrades are put on the back burner for far too long.

State-of-the-art irrigation systems help golf facilities conserve water and provide golfers with the firm, consistent playing surfaces they desire. Keep this win-win concept in mind the next time irrigation upgrades are discussed as a way to improve the infrastructure at your golf facility.

Visit the [USGA Water Resource Center](#) for tools and information that can help golf facilities conserve and protect water resources.