



Even after a storm has passed and there are no puddles in sight, a golf course may need to remain closed to allow time for the turf to dry.

SOMETIMES GOLF COURSES NEED A BREAK

BY DAVE OATIS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST REGION

As passionate golfers, we all want to get out on the course quickly after renovation projects or weather delays. However, it is important not to let our enthusiasm make us forget the needs of turf and the damage that could be caused by playing when conditions dictate that a course should be closed. Opening a course when it isn't ready can jeopardize turf health and long-term playing conditions. Just like waiting for Christmas morning, sometimes patience is required.

Turf may look healthy enough to handle traffic, but there is a lot more beneath the surface that must be considered. Achieving 100-percent turf cover is the first milestone for new or recovering turf surfaces. However, even then turf still needs additional time to mature and develop enough thatch to provide the cushioning and resiliency required to withstand golfer and maintenance traffic. Subjecting new or damaged turf to excessive traffic too soon will weaken it at best. At worst, it will cause longer-lasting damage that can result in further delays, more golfer frustration and possibly lost revenue.

Even if the course where you play golf hasn't rebuilt a putting green or performed a renovation project, the turf still requires periodic breaks to safeguard its health. The presence of frost provides a good example of a situation when golfers must be patient with a temporary, but necessary, course closure. Walking on frost-covered putting greens may not seem like a serious problem, but the force exerted on frozen turf can crush plant tissue. Ultimately, significant and long-term damage can result from walking on frost. Keep in mind that temperatures vary throughout a golf course – there may not be any frost on an elevated first tee but there may still be significant frost in shaded and low-lying areas.

Significant rain events are another example of when golf courses may need a break before play can resume. The rain may have stopped and there may not be any puddles in sight, but the absence of standing water does not necessarily mean the course is dry enough for traffic. Soils may still be saturated to the point that they will footprint and rut if subjected to foot or cart traffic. Turf leaves, crowns and even root systems can be physically injured when saturated soils are subjected to traffic. Saturated soils also are very susceptible to compaction. If damage is severe enough, expensive and disruptive aeration and topdressing may be necessary to relieve the compaction and restore surface smoothness.

Similar detrimental consequences can result when turf is subjected to heavy traffic during extremely hot, dry conditions. Healthy, mature turf is extremely resilient, but even the best turf won't hold up for long if it is subjected to too much traffic when conditions are extreme. Though always an unpopular decision, timely course closure can help avoid damage that might otherwise take weeks or months to heal. So, take a deep breath and be prepared to give a golf course a rest when deemed necessary. Remember, turf may need a break even if you don't.