



If superintendents do not irrigate during droughts, the negative impacts on grass health become noticeable quickly.

## THE COURSE SEEMS WET YET IT HASN'T RAINED IN WEEKS

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As golfers, you have probably experienced a golf course that seemed surprisingly wet during a drought. Most players appreciate the extra bounce and roll you receive during dry conditions and it can be confusing when there are wet spots on fairways or balls don't bound around greens like you anticipated even though it hasn't rained in weeks. What explains this situation?

All grasses have minimum water requirements that must be met to ensure plant health. Water applied during a drought ensures that grass continues to function normally and staves off dormancy from drought stress. As an agronomist that visits courses in an area prone to drought during the summer, I often hear golfers wonder why the fairways or greens are wet during dry weather. Without rain, the assumption is that the course should be bone dry and rock hard.

While this makes sense at face value, it is important to consider the duration of the drought and implications of prolonged drought stress during the heat of the summer. When grass is under stress, it begins to cease normal growth functions and will eventually enter a state of dormancy as a protective measure.

As grass begins to conserve energy and enter dormancy, the slower growth rate means that it is unable to recover from additional stresses like golfer traffic. Thus, water must be applied, albeit judiciously, to maintain plant health. At times, depending on the severity of the drought, this could mean that relatively high volumes of water are applied to the course. Any water applied at this point is simply to maintain plant health and not to alter playability.

It is also important to understand that the age and efficiency of the irrigation system plays a role in how watering affects playing conditions. Newer systems can apply water in precise amounts, exactly where it is needed. On the other hand, if the system is old and inefficient, water is probably applied in quantities that exceed what is necessary for optimal plant health. This often leads to puddles or overly wet areas and ultimately a noticeable effect on playability.

I cannot tell you how to feel but I would like to assure you, as a player of the game we love, that if the course seems wetter or softer than expected during a drought it is likely for a good reason. Water applied during a drought is meant to offset the lack of rain.

Droughts will eventually break, they always do, and normal weather patterns will return. When superintendents water to maintain plant health during a drought, it is to help the course return to the condition you expect once the most stressful weather is behind you.