



June Southeast Regional Roundtable, Part 2

By Chris Hartwiger and Todd Lowe, agronomists, Central Region

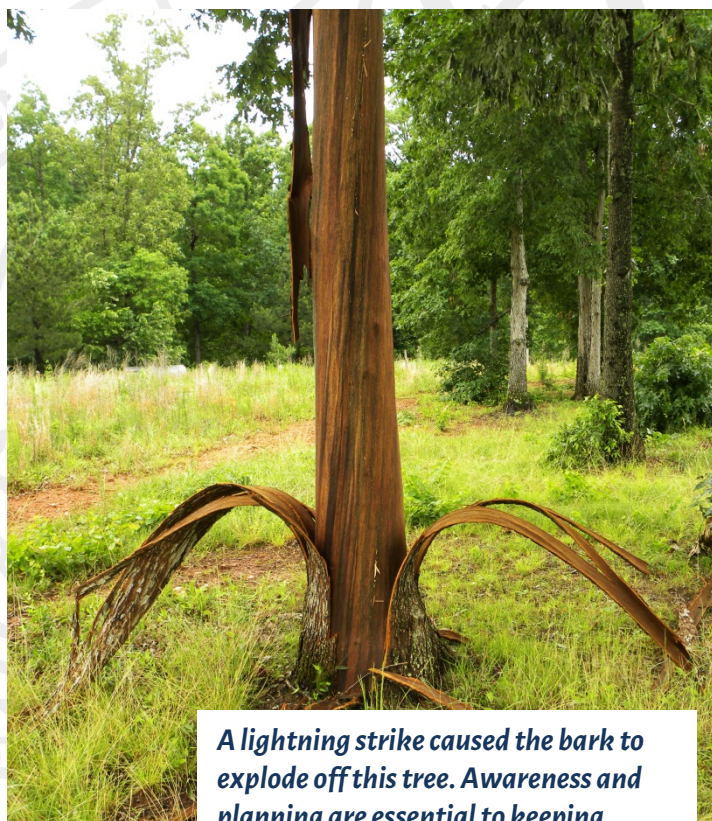
June 13, 2015

Recently, Chris Hartwiger and Todd Lowe had the chance to reflect on several weeks of travel in the Southeast and share their observations.

Chris Hartwiger

Lightning is dangerous. And summer is a time when golf courses are full and the chance of thunderstorms increases. In the last several weeks, this point has been driven home to me personally as I have been chased off a golf course by a pop-up thunderstorm that resulted in many nearby lightning strikes.

The picture included with this update shows an oak tree that was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm the previous night. Just like a banana is peeled from top to bottom, the lightning blew the bark off the tree on all sides. This occurred because the sap inside the tree is a



A lightning strike caused the bark to explode off this tree. Awareness and planning are essential to keeping people safe on the golf course.

poor conductor of electricity. The sap actually turned to steam, blasting the bark off the tree. The damaged tree is a reminder that lightning strikes are not to be taken casually.

As stated in the article, [A Detailed Analysis of Lightning Deaths Between 2006 - 2013](#) by John Jensenius, Lightning Safety Specialist at NOAA, 261 people were struck and killed by lightning between 2006-2013. More than 70 percent of the fatalities occurred in June, July, or August. Sadly, Jensenius reported that, *“Based on the media reports of the fatal incidents, many victims were either headed to safety at the time of the fatal strike or were just steps away from safety. Continued efforts are needed to convince people to get inside a safe place before the lightning threat becomes significant. For many activities, situational awareness and proper planning are essential to safety.”*

Jensenius admonition that situational awareness and proper planning are essential to safety is relevant for golf courses. Golf course superintendents - is your facility equipped with proper lightning detection equipment and are the proper procedures in place to teach your staff about what to do when thunderstorms pop up? If not, now is the time to seek the guidance of experts and make changes. Lightning is dangerous.

Todd Lowe

Summer is the time for cultivation on golf courses in our region. Many facilities that we visit this time of year are in the midst of various types of cultivation. A warm-season grass, like bermudagrass, literally grows on top of itself in layers of stems or thatch. If left alone, this thatch layer can become excessive and create spongy, soft playing conditions. This causes decreased aesthetics from mower scalping or "washboarding" and can cause problems with playability and turf health. A variety of cultivation practices are implemented on golf courses throughout the summer months including core aeration, verticutting, circle cutting and scalping to reduce thatch and maintain ideal playing conditions. Sand topdressing is another very important cultural practice that is being applied for premium playing conditions to dilute thatch and organic matter.

The frequency and intensity of cultivation programs are contingent on several factors including playing surface, nitrogen fertilization, duration of the growing season and the desired level of quality or "standard". These practices generate an abundance of organic debris and can cause the turf to look ragged and off-color for several weeks. This is especially true on areas that have received a variety of cultivation practices at one time. Fairways that have been core aerated, verticut and scalped can appear as though they were dead for several days until new



This fairway is off-color from previous scalping and it is now being verticut. While this may seem aggressive to most golfers, it produces premium turf conditioning during the peak play season.

green leaves develop and emerge. However, the long-term benefits of these programs are certainly worth the short-term inconvenience that they create.

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