



The Lesser of Two Evils

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

January 13, 2010

This is the time of the year when the office begins to receive calls regarding what to do about ice cover on putting greens. Any late November or early December ice has been buried under a deep layer of snow for nearly 40 days. With each passing day without a traditional "January thaw" we approach that magical number of ice days that ultimately results in death or severe injury to *Poa annua*.

Keep in mind that there are no absolutes when it comes to winter injury. All the *Poa* doesn't live under ice for 70 days and then die at the stroke of midnight on the 71st day. On the other hand, you had better plan on buying seed or sod for your *Poa* green when solid Thanksgiving ice is still around on Valentine's Day.

More often than not, my advice during January is to sit tight for at least a few more weeks and let nature take its course. The risk of removing ice from greens during early January is the potential injury of exposing turf to wind and frigid temperatures. Granted, ice cover can eventually cause injury to *Poa annua*, but it still provides the turf very effective protection from wind desiccation.

Furthermore, prolonged exposure to wind and low temperatures will kill the *Poa* **and** the bentgrass on the putting surface. I would rather enter the season with half a putting green versus no green at all.

The ideal scenario would be to remove ice just prior to a significant snowfall, but I wouldn't be willing to put my job in the hands of those who predict the weather. Another option is to remove ice and then blow or shovel the adjacent snow back on to the exposed turf, which is much easier said than done.

It's never easy to sit tight this time of the year when the crew at a nearby course begins to remove ice from greens, but with the coldest weather of winter to come, it may well be the lesser of two evils.

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