



## Don't Jump The Gun

By Bob Vavrek, regional director, Central Region

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Leaves are falling and superintendents are scheduling when to winterize their irrigation systems. It seems as though winterization begins just a little earlier each year; after all, no one wants to be left out in the cold and snow worrying about frozen pipes all winter.

Winterizing early means you are at the mercy of Mother Nature to supply the turf with moisture until next spring. You don't want to go into winter with lush turf and waterlogged soils that are just asking for snow mold and winterkill. On the

other hand, dry soil and turf affected by moisture stress can be very susceptible to desiccation injury during an open winter.



*Note less desiccation after a dry, open winter where a cover was used during late fall.*

Desiccation is an equal opportunity problem on the golf course that doesn't discriminate between *Poa annua*, creeping bentgrass, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. Nor does it discriminate between cool-season and warm-season grasses.

Maintaining a consistent level of moisture in the soil going into winter can at least shift the odds of preventing desiccation stress in your favor. However, maintaining a consistent level of soil moisture is easier said than done when wide swings in weather conditions occur during late fall. Giving dry turf that one last good drink of water before blowing out the irrigation system has proven to be a valuable practice over the years.

A simple cover can help prevent injury to greens and tees that have a history of desiccation – often those located in elevated, wind-swept areas that rarely maintain consistent snow cover. A moderately heavy application of sand topdressing just before winter also provides some protection from winter wind.

True...an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but don't try preventing irrigation problems too early at the expense of putting the turf in harm's way.

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