

Controlling Stress Variables Now Pays Off Later In The Season

By Keith Happ, regional director, Central Region

April 26, 2011

Spring travels through the Mid-Atlantic Region have provided many opportunities to examine turfgrass that has been inundated with persistent precipitation and cool temperatures. Saturated soils are frustrating to both golfers and golf course superintendents. There is nothing worse than trying to prepare the golf course for play while being concerned about self-inflicted damage from tire tracking, mower damage and foot traffic. It is equally distressing to worry about golf cart traffic that creates damage that, in many instances, is avoidable.



Many golf courses are operating short-handed. Employee callbacks and staffing have been kept at base levels for several reasons, including the budget. As a golfer, take into consideration these limitations and be realistic about expectations. More importantly, be realistic about playing the course during inclement weather.

In many portions of the Mid-Atlantic Region we have had few days of consistent, good conditions to allow the turf to grow. Anything that can be done to control stress variables (for example, golf cart traffic) will help over the long term. Superintendents are not trying to inconvenience golfers when golf carts cannot be used. They are simply trying to make the best long-term-decision for the grass and soil. Signs, ropes and other traffic-control measures are used to keep the course accessible while pointing golfers away from areas of potential damage. These signs and ropes must also be moved by the maintenance crew when mowing, and, while this is an inconvenience, traffic control measures are part of the landscape and are essential damage control measures.

To date, in most instances, marvelous root growth has been exhibited where aeration programs have been conducted and topdressing programs have been completed. While the tops of the grass have not been growing, roots continue to develop. In fact, most of the grasses develop the best roots in the spring, which aids in summer turf survival.

Many questions have been posed in respect to putting green management programs; in particular, mowing programs. The cool weather experienced this season is affecting turf growth. In fact, the cooler temperatures slow turf growth, and consistent growth patterns have not occurred, further hindering course preparation. For the short term, remain realistic about playing expectations. When the turf is growing consistently, many programs can be put into place to present the greens in the desired manner. Reducing the mowing heights early in the season in an attempt to smooth the surface or enhance ball roll, could predispose the turf during difficult weather later in the season. Close mowing now slows the development of roots that the turf needs for the summer.

Northeast Region Agronomists:

David A. Oatis, regional director – doatis@usga.org

James E. Skorulski, agronomist – j Skorulski@usga.org

Adam Moeller, agronomist – amoeller@usga.org

Elliott Dowling, agronomist – edowling@usga.org

Addison Barden, agronomist – abarden@usga.org

[Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service](#)

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)