



A Whole Lot Of Winter

By Jim Skorulski, agronomist, Northeast Region | February 2, 2018



Recent warm temperatures and rain helped to melt snow and ice from this putting green at Corning Country Club in upstate New York.

It already feels like it has been a long winter. Record cold temperatures have extended to the most southern parts of the Northeast Region. Recently, a mild period of weather melted snow and ice, exposing turf surfaces in some areas. A break in the cold temperatures has been welcomed. However, the fluctuating temperatures are creating reasonable cause for concern about turf conditions. Even several facilities in New England have already reported some damage.

[Temperature data](#) from the Northeast Regional Climate Center shows the fluctuating temperatures. The first blast of arctic air and wind occurred not long after Christmas. Temperatures fell into single digits, even falling well below zero in some areas. If annual bluegrass was exposed and hydrated during that first blast of arctic air it may have been vulnerable to damage from cold temperatures. Fortunately, dry turf surfaces protected by snow or cover systems were probably insulated enough to avoid injury.

A smaller but potent batch of cold air pushed back into the Northeast Region on January 13 after a two-day warmup when temperatures climbed into the 50- to 60-degree range. Over 24 hours, temperatures fell into the teens, again reaching well below zero in some areas. This flash freeze may have injured exposed turf. However, ice encasement – which is often responsible for winter injury – does not yet seem to be a concern outside of northern areas.

Golf courses in areas where turf has remained relatively exposed to cold temperatures may want to begin sampling playing surfaces to determine if damage has occurred. Early season damage from direct low temperatures can be easily overlooked, especially where turf is frozen and dormant. Use a reciprocating saw or a drill with a hole-cutting bit to pull a few plugs from annual bluegrass or bermudagrass areas. The news may not be welcomed, but it will help you communicate the situation and plan for recovery should there be a problem.

Stick with the basics and take advantage of snow's insulating ability by leaving it in place. When the snow starts to melt, create drainage channels in the snow to promote surface drainage. Begin monitoring for anoxic conditions if turf is under dense, solid ice for 20-30 days. Base decisions on whether to remove ice on turf conditions and the long-range weather forecast. Take time to review local temperature and precipitation data and pull a few plugs if you are concerned about turf damage. Experienced turf managers know there will likely be more weather challenges ahead.

We encourage you to call your regional USGA Agronomist if you have questions regarding turf conditions or the actions that can be taken going forward. Buckle in for what might be a wild ride ahead.

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