



The difference between lined and unlined bunkers can be astounding. Courses that regularly experience severe washouts should consider a bunker renovation.

PLAN NOW SO THAT THE PRESENT ISN'T REPEATED

BY ELLIOTT DOWLING | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

Author Alan Lakein once said, “Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.” This quote rings true especially for superintendents in the Northeast this season. The summer of 2018 will go down as one of the most challenging seasons in recent history because of frequent heavy rains in conjunction with periods of hot and humid weather.

During stressful seasons, golf course managers learn a lot about themselves and the golf course they manage. What was considered a minor nuisance during a normal year can become a major problem under stressful conditions. Two cases in point this year are drainage deficiencies and bunkers that are prone to washouts. Golf courses in the Northeast, especially in Maryland and Virginia, have been inundated with rain during July and August. This has caused turf decline in low-lying pockets where water sits and where soils remain saturated for prolonged periods, but the issues don't end there. Frequent bunker washouts are placing a strain on maintenance budgets because of the amount of time needed for repair.

While both issues have been exacerbated this year by record-setting rain, it doesn't mean they can't happen again. Plan now for fall and winter drainage projects by creating a prioritized list based on the issues observed this summer. The amount and type of drainage required depends on several factors, but in many cases French drains and catch basins in low-lying areas will do the trick. If you aren't sure how much drainage is required to address a problem area, install extra. Installing the minimum amount of drainage may not completely solve the problem and you don't want to be addressing the same area again next year. You also want to be sure that any improvements you make are not simply shifting the drainage issue from one area to another.

The number and severity of bunker washouts this season is exposing issues with bunker drainage, design, sand selection and other factors. Maintenance teams are spending too much time repairing bunkers. One course in New Jersey consumed 212 labor hours to repair their bunkers following a severe washout event! With each washout and subsequent repair, sand can be further contaminated. For golf courses that have experienced issues with washouts and contaminated sand for a while, this year proves a sore reminder that a renovation is needed.

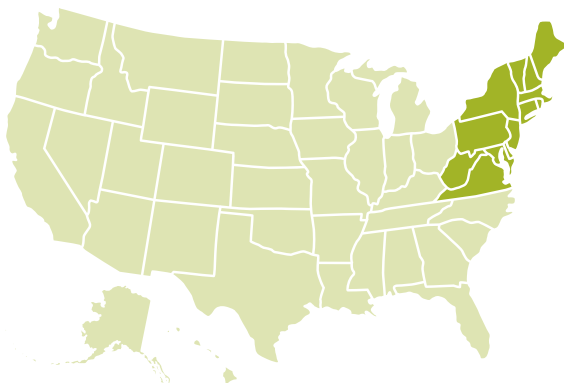
During a bunker renovation, install a liner to help reduce washouts and protect the sand from subsoil contamination. Modern bunker liners help reduce the long-term expense of bunker maintenance and refurbishment. Architecture has a big influence on washouts as well. Steep sand faces and bunkers that are subjected to surface water flow are more prone to washouts than grass-faced bunkers and bunkers that do not receive heavy surface drainage. The USGA article, "[Managing Bunkers](#)," provides more information on improving bunker performance and reducing the cost of bunker maintenance.

Benjamin Franklin must have known something about turf management when he said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Not making plans to correct the issues that have arisen this year and wishing for a more moderate season next year only sets you up for failure. Take care of the challenging work now so that the same problems don't happen again in the future. Your future self will thank you for the work you do today.



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