



“Feast-Or-Famine” Rainfall Causing Problems In The Southeast

By Todd Lowe, agronomist, Southeast Region | July 7, 2017



Lakes have gone from several feet below normal to several feet above normal after more than 20 inches of rain in less than three weeks.

Less than two months ago, some golf courses in the Southeast were dealing with a drought that saw only a couple of inches of rainfall since October 2016. In fact, the prolonged dry conditions were to blame for more than 125 wildfires across Florida. Localized dry spots were widespread this past spring and golf courses were forced to prioritize irrigation as water supplies shrank. Some courses began hand watering tees and fairway landing areas to conserve water as their irrigation lakes dried up considerably.

The exact opposite has occurred this past month, with some areas receiving more than 25 inches of rainfall in three weeks. In fact, lakes are now filled to the brim on many golf courses. Saturated soil conditions in fairways and roughs are causing plugged lies and leaving mud on golf balls. Scald on turf in low-lying areas and tire rutting from mowers and golf carts also is taking place. Reduced mowing in wet areas will eventually lead to an abundance of clippings and scalping once the soil dries and mowing resumes.

Plant growth regulators can be a superintendent's best friend during times like these. These chemicals help reduce vertical turf growth and increase density. Regulated turf does not require as frequent mowing as unregulated turf, which can be very helpful if rains make

it difficult to mow on a routine basis. Also, golf courses that apply sand topdressing to fairways will have firmer conditions, fewer plugged lies and less mud on golf balls during wet weather than those that do not topdress.

Reduced sunlight from prolonged cloudy weather can be stressful on putting greens and mowing heights may need to be raised slightly during these conditions. Keep in mind that turfgrasses need solar energy to create food and turf leaves are like mini solar panels. A reduction in sunlight can be offset with an increase in turfgrass leaf area. This may temporarily reduce green speeds, but long-term turf health is worth a short-term reduction in speed. Double mowing and rolling can help improve green speeds if turf is healthy enough to support these maintenance practices.

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