



Hurricane Irma: Golf Courses Are Still Picking Up The Pieces

By Todd Lowe, agronomist, Southeast Region | October 6, 2017



Fallen trees, debris and flooding are just a few of the issues caused by Hurricane Irma.

Hurricane Irma dealt a serious blow to golf courses throughout the Southeast Region. Unfortunately, trees and turf cannot evacuate and must endure the high winds and flooding that accompany hurricanes. Golf course maintenance staffs are then left with the arduous task of picking up the pieces and getting golf courses playable again.

Tree loss and flooding was reported at many golf facilities because of the high winds and estimated 15 inches of rainfall that occurred in some areas. Irma made landfall in southwest Florida, which was already saturated from months of above-average rainfall. Some facilities required more than a week to drain before they could assess the damage and remove or salvage hundreds of trees. The University of Florida has produced several helpful articles that address the topic of [urban forest hurricane recovery](#). They also provide excellent resources for tree selection, maintenance and cleanup.

It is important to remember that some pine trees may continue to decline over the next few years from damage sustained during the hurricane. Even though they remained upright and appear healthy, excessive winds may have irrevocably damaged some pines. This was observed on golf courses after the hurricanes in 2004 and 2005. Pine needles turned

yellow and trees died for several years after the storms. To learn more about this issue, read "[Wind and Trees: Lessons Learned From Hurricanes.](#)"

Temporary flooding from storm surge and rainfall deposited debris on golf courses and caused damage to some irrigation controllers. Turf in low-lying areas that remains saturated may experience additional injury from scald. If so, these areas may require sodding to recover adequately before the peak playing season.

Extended power loss also caused turf injury at several facilities because irrigation systems were not able to function. Fortunately, bermudagrass is resilient to drought and should recover as irrigation is restored.

Additional problems occurred at facilities that are in the midst of renovations. There are approximately a dozen golf courses in the Naples area that had renovation projects disrupted by the storm, prolonging course closures. In addition to completing the renovations, these facilities are now removing damaged trees and cleaning up washouts in areas with loose soil. Also, some construction crews evacuated for safety, causing delays in the construction process as they slowly mobilize back onto the golf courses.

At some point, take inventory of your experience with this storm and consider steps to help prepare your facility for future hurricanes. Write a preparedness document and save pictures for your files. A [hurricane preparedness document](#) will help minimize damage from future hurricanes and help get the golf course back open sooner.

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

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