



Trees on a golf course must be monitored and pruned on a regular basis to avoid issues with shade and reduced air movement.

LOOK OUT FOR LIGHTNING

BY PATRICK O'BRIEN | AGRONOMIST, SOUTHEAST REGION

A massive lightning strike during the second round of the 2019 U.S. Women's Open at the Country Club of Charleston amazed attendees and television viewers with a display of awesome power from Mother Nature. Thankfully, nobody was hurt and play was able to resume later that evening. This incident should serve as a valuable reminder of how dangerous lightning can be on a golf course.

The most important consideration when lightning is in the area is the safety of golfers and staff. Most golf courses have a lightning detection system and sirens to warn people of lightning in the area. Golfers and the maintenance staff should heed those warnings. Trying to complete that last bit of mowing before a storm hits may be well-intentioned, but it is simply not worth the risk and the staff should always put their safety first.

Once a storm has safely passed, it is important to check the golf course for any damage that may pose a safety risk. At the Country Club of Charleston, a large live oak was struck and damaged by the lightning. An arborist was called to make an assessment of the tree and they felt that damage to the tree and its

roots made it a safety risk that should be removed. In this case, the resources were available to have the tree removed overnight before the next day's play to ensure the safety of all. Such a quick turnaround may not be possible if a tree is damaged by lightning at your golf facility, but a safe perimeter can be roped off around a damaged tree to keep golfers and staff away from danger. Apart from lightning damage, check trees on the property for broken branches and other damage that may have been caused by high winds.

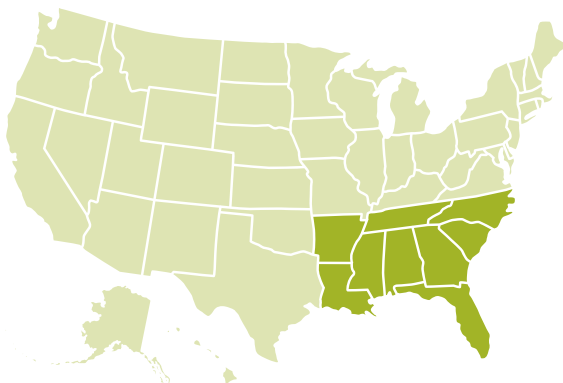
In addition to serious safety issues, lightning also poses a threat to golf course infrastructure. Lightning strikes can damage irrigation components and disable the system. These issues can be costly to repair and may pose a threat to turf health if the irrigation system cannot be fully repaired quickly. Fortunately, heavy rain often accompanies lightning, so if the irrigation system has been damaged there will likely be some extra soil moisture to tide you over.

Lightning strikes are a serious risk every summer on golf courses throughout the U.S. Golfers and staff at all facilities should be aware of the danger and should always put safety first.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

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