



Bunker washouts have been common this year and make retaining employees that much more difficult given the grueling work required to repair them. (USGA/Chris Keane)

BUNKER WASHOUTS: DESTROYING MORALE ONE EMPLOYEE AT A TIME

BY ADDISON BARDEN | AGRONOMIST, SOUTHEAST REGION

The greatest challenge that has faced golf course superintendents over the past several years has been the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff. All courses – regardless of budget – are impacted by this labor shortage, but those hit worst are struggling to simply keep up with mowing the entire golf course each week. Unfortunately, Mother Nature isn't cutting them any breaks this summer.

Common pop-up thunderstorms throughout the Southeast are making it more difficult to complete daily maintenance with an undersized staff. These storms pack heavy winds and significant rain amounts in a short time span – washing out bunker sand, spreading debris throughout the golf course, knocking down trees, breaking irrigation pipe with lightning strikes, saturating soils and much more.

Out of all these challenges, repairing bunker washouts may be the most hated task among golf course superintendents and crew members. Repairing washouts is slow, back-breaking work and the staff could easily be out the next day repairing the very same bunker if another pop-up storm strikes. Simply put,

frequent heavy rain events each summer can be a morale killer for a fully staffed maintenance crew and the straw that broke the camel’s back for undersized crews.

Bunker washouts also impact the consistency of bunker sand. The constant movement of sand can create overly soft conditions in the short term, and contamination from washouts can negatively impact playability and sand drainage in the long term. Perhaps the most significant impact to golfers is the logistical challenge that bunker washouts present to the maintenance team. Superintendents must choose which tasks will be performed each day. When bunkers get washed out by a storm, some other aspect of course management must be skipped to repair the bunkers.

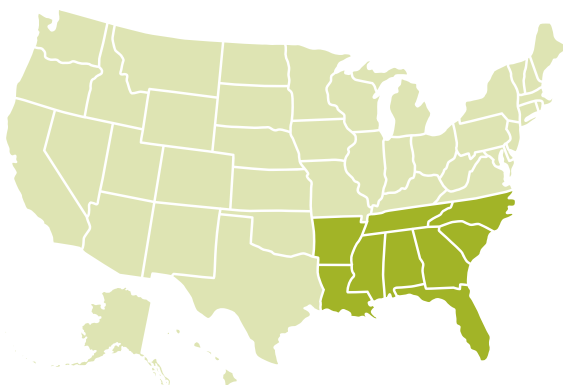
What can golfers do to help? Every course’s design and available maintenance resources are different, which greatly impacts a maintenance team’s ability to address issues like washouts. It is important to understand that the maintenance team is doing their best to maintain the golf course with the resources available. Given the current labor shortage, being understanding, patient, and offering a quick “thank you” is the best way to support those who work hard maintaining our golf courses.

What can superintendents do? Document labor-hour allocation to communicate the impact of bunker washouts on course maintenance. This data can be used to communicate the need for a bunker renovation, higher wages or more employees. Also, temporary labor services are a good resource for washout repairs.



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

[Learn More](#)



SOUTHEAST REGION AGRONOMISTS:

Chris Hartwiger, Director, USGA Course Consulting Service, chartwiger@usga.org

Steve Kammerer, Ph.D., Regional Director, skammerer@usga.org

Patrick M. O’Brien, Agronomist, patobrien@usga.org

Addison Barden, Agronomist, abarden@usga.org

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

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)
