



El Niño Part II: As Problems Mount, Document and Communicate

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Our previous Regional Update, [Strong El Niño Impacting Southern Golf Courses](#), reported the impact of El Niño on golf courses throughout the Southeast Region and listed several maintenance practices to improve turf health and playability. Since that update, we have received even more rain – more than five times the average rainfall for this time of year in some areas. Saturated soils, extended low sunlight and cooler temperatures have caused weaker turf conditions at many facilities throughout the region.

Document the Problems

As expected, El Niño conditions are causing turf decline on many golf courses. Turf areas that receive other forms of chronic stress – e.g., shade, traffic, poor-quality soil, poor drainage, etc. – have experienced much more severe decline. Now is the time to document problematic areas and formulate a plan for addressing chronic problem areas. Below are a few areas to focus on:



Chronic weak areas, like this wet perimeter caused by an elevated collar, are thinning out with continual rain and reduced sunlight from El Niño.

- **Shade:** Closely mowed areas like greens and tees are especially sensitive to shade and can become thin in shaded areas. Turf thinning is worse in winter when the sun angle is lower and day length is shorter than

summer. Evaluate shade problems now and determine which trees should be removed later this summer.

- **Elevated Collars:** Putting green collars can become elevated from years of sand topdressing. These “sand dams” can reduce surface runoff and cause water to sit on putting green perimeters for long periods. Furthermore, mowers often cause more mechanical stress along green perimeters with elevated collars. Take note of weak green perimeters and determine whether collar stripping, aeration or excavation/reshaping is needed later this year.
- **Organic Matter:** Southern golf courses accumulate organic matter at a faster pace than golf courses in other regions. If not properly diluted, too much organic matter impedes internal drainage, which affects plant health and creates a wet, spongy surface for golf. If needed, plan for a more aggressive aeration and topdressing program for this year.
- **Drainage:** A rainy season exposes areas of poor drainage and results in more days where carts are kept on paths. Neither standing water nor carts restricted to paths are desirable. Map out problem drainage areas and address them over the coming months.

Communicate

Documenting key issues now is only the first step. Be sure to involve course officials in the process by communicating the issues and offering solutions. People have short memories; six months from now, winter will be long-forgotten but the weaknesses in course infrastructure will remain. Even though conditions are tough now, take the opportunity to document and communicate.

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