

The Heat Is On

By Larry Gilhuly, agronomist, West Region

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A sign seen posted near the first tee read, "Due to damage caused by golf carts on the turf, all golf carts are restricted to the paths today." Now those of you reading this may wonder why a regional update is going to talk about staying on the paths (usually for frost) when the calendar says it is nearing the middle of the summer. Recent visits to several golf courses show that substantial turf damage can and does occur in either the winter or summer with golf carts providing the primary focus.



It is a very common and understood practice to restrict golf carts to paths in the winter months when frost occurs. The damage is immediate with ruptured cells resulting in dead, brown tire marks that can last for months in the Pacific Northwest. But what about the summer? What is your cart policy when your *Poa annua* dominated fairways are hit with triple digit temperatures similar to what occurred recently? Furthermore, what is your cart policy if you have a power outage that coincides with warm temperatures resulting in severe moisture stress of any grass found on the golf course?

If you do not treat your golf course in the same manner as you do in the winter during times of frost, then be ready for the same streaks of brown turf. While the turf will recover faster in the summer, these 4-wheeled mashers of monocots cause considerable damage under abnormal extremes and should be restricted to cart paths as some golf courses have started doing in the past two years.

So, how do you get golfers to recognize that severely moisture-stressed areas must be avoided without placing ropes and stakes all over the golf course? Communicate to them in all forms, including photos placed in conspicuous locations (restrooms are one of the best spots) with a few words, such as "Avoid dry or brown areas!" Use your clubs' newsletter and email with photos showing the damage from both frost and summer moisture stress with a short and simple explanation. Finally, when the heat is really on, place photos on every single golf cart that goes on the course as an obvious reminder that they can do significant damage.

Note—the next Northwest Region update will include helpful hints on how to extract golf carts from lakes and other wet areas that will be driven into while avoiding moisture stressed locations.

Source: Larry Gilhuly (lgilhuly@usga.org or (253) 858-2266)

West Region Agronomists:

Patrick J. Gross, regional director – pgross@usga.org

Larry W. Gilhuly, agronomist – lgilhuly@usga.org

Brian S. Whitlark, agronomist – bwhitlark@usga.org

Blake Meentemeyer, agronomist – bmeentemeyer@usga.org

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