

## What's On My Ballot

By Derf Soller, agronomist, West Region

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Throughout the course of many Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visits this year, I have seen some things that I am afraid, if elected to become a part of an ongoing maintenance program at any golf course, will eventually impact the long range health of golf facilities.

The first ballot measure is on the timing, or even postponing, of the proven cultural practice of greens aeration. More golf courses are justifying delaying the procedure into shoulder seasons (very early or very late in the golf season), or even worse, are postponing altogether. The reasons do not justify the decisions.

I have never heard, even once, that it is too expensive to aerate. The common "justification" is only that *golfers don't like it!* Well, I'm sorry to say, this is no reason to NOT aerate putting surfaces. None of us very much likes colonoscopies, but we go through them for our own health. (Note to younger readers: You will soon enough understand) Aeration can be skipped once in a great while for a major event that a golf course is having, but aeration should immediately be put back into the maintenance program. By major event, I do not mean Club ABC's member/guest. I mean major events like the State Amateur, the NCAA, or the US Open.

The second major ballot item I am concerned with has ties to course finances, and that is the cost of purchasing and trucking fees associated with sand used for topdressing. Many facilities still understand the needs and importance of a good, consistent topdress program, but are trying to find a way to minimize this expense by looking at alternative sands. This exercise is ok to a point, but many are purchasing materials that they have not submitted to an accredited laboratory for particle size distribution testing.

I have made TAS visits where the superintendent takes me to a pile of sand on the property and asks me "What do you think of this sand for topdressing?" I say, "I recommend that all sands used to topdressing putting surfaces be sent in for analysis, and have the laboratory make the decision if the new material is compatible with your current greens." This is not the answer these superintendents look for, but it is the only way to be sure. Topdressing materials utilized on sand based greens must be compatible or the integrity of the entire green profile will be compromised. Most piles of sand 'look good', but only testing and comparisons to the original greens construction material provides the correct answer. Topdressing sand purchased for fairways and tees made of native soils can have much greater variability in the particle distribution, and searching for a cost effective material makes sense in this instance.

So, get out there and campaign at your facilities. Educate the voters (your course players, members, officials) and make sure your election gets you the results you need.

Happy Course Winterization!

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