

Are You Ready For El Niño?

By Pat Gross, regional director, West Region

December 1, 2015

The predicted El Niño weather pattern for this winter is expected to bring heavy rainfall – a welcome relief after almost five years of drought. Will your golf course be ready for the rain? Here is a brief checklist of activities to prepare for a wet winter season:

1. Check and clear drains – Subsurface drains haven't gotten much of a workout in recent years and may be filled with debris. Now is a good time to flush drains with a jet nozzle on the end of a hose. If a blockage is suspected, many plumbing contractors have fiber optic cameras that can be inserted into drain pipes to help you identify problems and decide the best way to treat the problem.
2. Plan for bunker repairs and sand addition/ replacement – Sand bunkers are sure to get flooded during heavy rains and, when they do, the subsoil tends to mix with the sand resulting in a mud layer on the sand surface. Sometimes the mud layer can be scraped off and some fresh sand added to restore good playability. If the sand is older and already contaminated with silt and debris, this coming year may be the time to plan for sand replacement.



The mud left behind when bunkers get flooded often necessitates replacing bunker sand.

3. Monitor soil nutrient status – While the rain will do a good job of flushing soluble salts and sodium out of the soil, you can also expect nitrogen and potassium to be leached. Although phosphorus doesn't leach as readily as nitrogen or potassium, it can be lost through soil erosion. It is a good idea to monitor soil nutrient status in late winter and early spring to see if a complete fertilizer with nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium will be needed to replenish what is lost due to heavy rain. In the meantime, only light applications of nitrogen and potassium should be made as needed to sustain healthy growth without contributing to leaching and runoff.
4. Review your cart use policy – Uncontrolled cart use on wet soil can cause ruts and soil compaction that can take months to recover and correct. Every golf facility should have a cart use policy in place that includes criteria for when the course is closed to carts, when carts are restricted to cart paths only and who makes the decision regarding cart use.
5. Get your rain gear, umbrellas, sump pumps and squeegees ready. We may finally have a reason to use them this winter.

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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