

FM Radios on the Golf Course

Using the latest communication technology gives you the next best thing to being in two places at once. James Moore looks at the advantages and the systems being adopted by American golf course superintendents

Whether you choose to admit it, you live in and are part of a hi-tech society. You can't start your car without activating a series of micro-computers beneath the bonnet.

Well the computers under the bonnet may baffle you, you may not have looked in the back of your TV lately, and your old Timex may still be merrily ticking away, but even if you are shy of technology, as a golf course manager you need to take a hard look at FM two-way radio communication, one of the most useful and sensible hi-tech tools ever introduced to the golf course. Radios are not new to golf course maintenance; they have been around in one form or another for years. In the past, however, they have been inefficient, costly, and bulky. Although they occasionally accomplished their goal of allowing voice communication between two parties, their use was limited to this sole function. If you think this is all radios can do today, you are in for some surprises.

The most obvious application of a radio system on the golf course is helping the course manager better

manage his crew. Piercing whistles and bullhorns have obvious limitations, particularly during the member-guest or club championship. Citizen-band radios occasionally meet this need. Unfortunately, CBs are limited in their range, and are not very portable because they need antennae. There is also the very real problem of unexpected visitors to the channel you may be using. A CB blasting out, "How bout ya, Sugar Bear? You got your ears on?" could really prove embarrassing on ladies' day.

Fortunately, highly compact and portable FM radios have solved these problems and many others. They have plenty of range for the typical golf course.

If communication is necessary over a larger area, the signal can be strengthened by a repeater extending the range to many miles. A repeater is actually an amplifier that takes your transmitted signal, makes it stronger, and re-transmits it to the various receivers on your frequency.

FM systems allow you to communicate privately with your crew since you are assigned your own fre-

quency. They are small and easily carried, with some units being as little as 6 x 3 x 1 inches. They are quickly rechargeable and extremely reliable. And now the really good news - they are finally affordable!

Two types of FM units should be acquired.

1. Base station. This unit is usually the same or similar to the type of FM two-way radio installed in a vehicle. As a base station it is equipped with a dc power supply, an external antenna, and a desk microphone. The base unit is typically installed in the mechanic's area of the shop or in the course manager's office, if a secretary is employed.

2. Portables. These are the small, hand-held units. A minimum configuration for most courses would provide a unit to the course manager, each assistant course manager, the irrigation technician, and the mechanic.

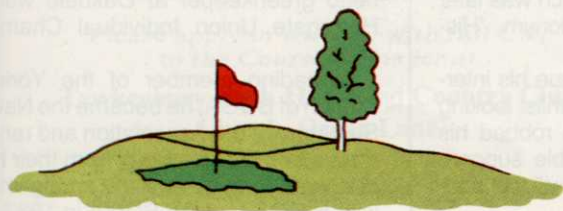
A touch keypad for making and receiving telephone calls is a valuable and inexpensive option for the course manager's unit. Similar in operation to a mobile or cellular car phone, it helps the superintendent stay in touch regardless of his loca-

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tion. This allows him to meet his often conflicting duties of direct supervision of the crew and managerial responsibilities in the office.

The advantages of reliable and immediate communications between the course manager and the crew are too numerous to cover fully. Obvious applications include:

1. Testing, repair, and adjustment of the irrigation system.
2. Avoiding lost man-hours due to equipment breakdown.
3. Constant adjustment of the daily maintenance schedule to make the maximum use of available man-hours.
4. The coordination of activities such as tournaments, chemical applications, and special projects.
5. Since the maintenance workers are almost constantly on the course, they are usually close by when an accident or medical emergency occurs. Once equipped with radios, they can quickly summon help.

The technology is already available to make FM radio systems work for you and

your club in other ways as well as talking to the crew.

Many clubs have installed phones on the course in case of medical emergencies and to prevent long delays between nines as players stop for food and drink. Conventional phone lines require costly installation and often ditching across the golf course.

Many industries use FM voice reporter units to monitor and report on the function of specialized equipment. These units are triggered by an event such as low pressure, high temperature, etc., and a call is made to the portable base station or even a pocket pager. A recorded message is then played announcing the event.

There are many uses for such a system on the golf course - particularly regarding the irrigation system. Imagine the savings of water and electricity (as well as turfgrass) that could be realized if the monitor detected power lost from the pumping station. The course manager would be notified by the voice reporter unit with a message such as "pump station power off."

I mentioned that two-way FM communication systems are now affordable. Although the prices will vary according to the system you choose and your dealer, listed below are some rough estimates of what you will currently need to spend.

Base station	\$1,000-\$1,200 (including antenna and desk microphone)
Course manager's portable	\$600-\$700 (with telephone option)
Crew's portable (each)	\$500-\$600
Repeater service	\$20-\$25 (if necessary, per unit per month)

At first glance, the cost may seem high even though these numbers are significantly lower than they were one or two years ago. Actually, most courses would recover the cost of the system quickly as man-hours are saved and work is carried out more efficiently.

For most golf courses, the year's capital equipment purchases are just around the corner. Give strong consideration to acquiring a two-way FM radio system. It is a purchase you will find well worth the cost.

OBITUARY

The death occurred just before Easter of E. W. Park, 62, a member and past Captain of Lindrick Golf Club. He was a regular contributor to this magazine and its predecessor *Greenkeeper*, as well as a personal friend and supporter.

Eddie's first contact with greenkeeping was at St Bees school in Cumbria where, being a keen golfer he looked after the school's nine hole course. The course, situated on a cliff overlooking the Irish sea was blessed with fine turf, as well as a flock of sheep, so maintenance was minimal and traditional. Upon leaving St Bees he qualified in dentistry at Edinburgh University moving to Worksop where he met and married his wife Nan. Eventually he practiced in Sheffield in a 'family' business, with daughter Sarah and Nick joining him in the practise and his devoted wife assisting with the administration. He was a greatly respected member of his profession.

With his son Nick, Eddie became one of the most knowledgeable laymen on greenkeeping matters, which enabled him to collaborate with Nick on a series of articles, published in *Golf Monthly*. 'The Management of British Golf Courses'. This was subsequently published in booklet form and through the Greenkeeper Training Committee distributed to all golf clubs.

However, it was in his capacity of Captain, and Green Chairman of Lindrick Golf Club that Eddie made his mark in the field of golf course maintenance which became his great interest. For a period he acted as course manager before handing over to the current young, skilled Lindrick greenstaff. He studied golf course conditions country-wide and had amassed a considerable collection of slides on course conditions good and bad which he used for his numerous talks to greenkeeping groups. He was a friend and confidant to many greenkeepers and a firm believer that the condition of our courses would not improve until the ordinary golfer was better educated to the methods needed to achieve good playing conditions all the year round.

Another of his interest lay in country houses. He assisted his wife Nan on the research for her book 'Schooldays at Chatsworth', an account of her schools war time evacuation to Chatsworth House, the home of the Duke of Devonshire. Discovering the Duke's connection with local golf clubs, Eddie set about researching the subject of 'country house golf' which was later published under the pseudonym 'Historicus' in *Golf Monthly*.

He had retired early to pursue his interests, and his untimely death whilst looking at a course in Cheshire has robbed his family and friends of invaluable support. The whole of greenkeeping will be saddened by his passing.

OBITUARY

Walter Heeles, Secretary of the British Golf Greenkeepers Association for over 12 years died in Harrogate District Hospital, last month after a short illness.

The high regard of Walter's contribution to golf was reflected in the huge attendance at his funeral, by not only the officials and members of his club but greenkeepers nationwide and representatives from the amenity turf industry.

The service was conducted by the Rev. Richard Kayes, an Oakdale member, Walter's one time playing partner and a family friend.

Mr Heeles, who was 63 had been Oakdale's head greenkeeper for 23 years, accepting the position when his business premises were compulsory purchased in 1963.

A talented natural golfer he joined Knaresborough Golf Club as a young man and in 1962 was elected Captain. He won the President's Cup in 1955, held the amateur course record and later when head greenkeeper at Oakdale won the Harrogate Union Individual Championship.

A leading member of the Yorkshire Branch of BGGGA, he became the National Secretary of the Association and ran their affairs with his wife Betty from their home in Knaresborough until the amalgamation with EIGGA and the BGGGA in 1987.