

OVERWATERING

If you have read the 'small print' contained within the pages of the R & A's new publication, 'The Way Forward', you will doubtless have noted the comment - nay, criticism that "Over watering has been a major cause - greater perhaps than that of increased play - of the deterioration of British greens over the last two decades".

Obviously linked to the high increase in the use of automatic watering systems which we have witnessed on our golf courses, this critical view needs to be qualified. Far from being an attack on the principles of automatic watering systems, it is, in my opinion, a telling comment about the manner in which systems are designed and used. The truth is this. Any automatic watering system should be looked at as a management tool. Assuming the design is right and it is used intelligently, it will provide all the 'instant' benefits which greenkeepers seek to assist their task of course maintenance.

Used without thought, (or poorly designed) an automatic watering system will put on too much (or too little) water - with the obvious long term consequences...

Having said that, we then enter the murky waters of comparing competitive irrigation systems. Without doubt, the quality of a system's design, its component parts, standard of installation, operation and equally important, regular maintenance all contribute to the system's (and operator's) ability to control the amounts of moisture used relative to the weather and local conditions.

For years, Toro Technical Sales Engineers have been trying to get this vital message across to club's only interested in buying an irrigation system - at the lowest possible price. Entitled "The Thinking Man's Guide to Golf Course Watering", Toro even produced a booklet on the subject, aimed primarily at educating green commit-

tees. It stressed the long term sense of purchasing a system designed not just to supplement average rainfall, (as many do) but to be capable of not only providing maximum coverage but stepping-up its performance overnight to meet the sudden demands of long, dry periods - such as last summer. Such a system usually costs more money up-front but, unlike systems designed down to a price - and only capable of providing supplemental watering - the more expensive system provides ultimate flexibility of performance as and when the need arises.

Cedric Johns says systems are designed as a management tool. Used correctly overwatering problems can be eliminated.

Such a system also substantially reduces the risk of over watering and because it is properly 'balanced', its ability to provide consistent coverage all around the golf course is enhanced. Add the sophistication of 'Single head control' - which enables the selective use of groups or single sprinklers to be switched 'on' or 'off' around the course and greenkeeping staff can really 'play tunes' on the system! These refinements not only save water and energy costs, they demand a higher premium at the point of purchase. In the longer term however, additional money is not subsequently wasted by clubs pushed into improving the inferior performance of a system purchased on the lower price principle.

An irrigation system should be regarded as an efficient management tool - providing clubs are prepared to invest in a good quality design plus high standards of installation - and maintenance. Get that right and then put the system in the hands of greenkeeping staff who know how to use it correctly then the danger of over watering is virtually eliminated.

Remember, like most other "systems" in daily use in business or industry, the effective end product is in the hands of the people who design, install and operate it. So apart from insisting that your club's system meet your course's requirements (not someone else's) make sure that all the other vitally important factors are fulfilled. If you or your greens staff are not totally certain how to obtain optimum results ask your nearest Distributor to arrange further training.

No doubt many of you are aware that a rain gauge - electronically linked to an irrigation system's controller, will, if the amount of rainfall detected exceeds the column of water already planned for distribution via sprinklers, cancel the set programme.

That's one way of safeguarding against over watering - especially if the heavens open up during the night...

Now, Toro are introducing an even more sophisticated method of preventing soil moisture levels rising above (or falling below) optimum levels during the summer months.

The 'Moist-o-Matic Soil Sensor Kit', it comprises an adjustable sensor unit which is electrically wired up to the irrigation system's main controller. Set to pre-determined 'wet' or 'dry' moisture levels, the sensor is buried under a green (usually that nearest to the controller) where it will automatically read the sub-soil moisture content. In other words, it 'thinks' for you!

The benefits are these:-

1. Overwatering is eliminated.
2. Infestation of annual meadow grass will be reduced..
3. Greens will be firmer, more resilient and less prone to disease..
4. Water wastage is controlled, reducing costs.
5. It reduces pumping requirements - and the cost of running the pumps..
6. The Soil Sensor Kit provides even tighter control of watering programmes.

The sensor can be wired up to any existing electro-mechanical or solid state controller. Cost? Around £425 plus VAT plus installation charge.

Prime Watermen Ltd

Wangford

Beccles

Suffolk

NR34 8AX

Tel: (0502 78) 481

Tlx: 975731 PRIME G

IRRIGATION SYSTEMS - DESIGN - SUPPLY - INSTALLATION

Dependable custom designed irrigation systems that will work for you day and night unsupervised, and keep working year after year.

A PRIME system using WEATHER-MATIC integrated components represents a value for money investment allowing for future expansion together with economy of use.

Let us undertake a study to answer your questions or give a free estimate on the system that really works.

Weather matic
LAWN AND TURF IRRIGATION

THE AUTOMATIC CHOICE FOR IRRIGATION