



Computer wizardry takes the

pain out of paperwork

Keeping golf course records is important, be they kept via the user-friendly TRIMS computer package or through a simple manual system - and the greenkeeper should know what to have on file and how to use the information recorded.

STEVE ISAAC, Advisory Agronomist with the STRI, asks the pertinent questions and provides many of the answers

Ask any greenkeeper why he entered the profession, and involvement with paperwork will come very low on his list of replies. However, the task of keeping up-to-date and detailed records is more important than ever, now that golf course management is big business. With the distinction between head greenkeeper and course manager becoming less clear; more Clubs prepared to give the head man more responsibility and more head men prepared to take it, the need to maintain a well ordered records system has never been greater.

Storing records is a science in itself. Papers should not be kept in a disorderly biscuit tin, where it will take several hours to find the specific piece you want. All head greenkeepers should be provided with a filing cabinet within which information is grouped into different subject matter. The TRIMS computer package is - in essence - a filing cabinet which contains a number of files detailing different facets of the greenkeepers job. Like all record-keeping, the input of information takes time, be it a manual or computer system. However, once the information is installed, retrieval should be a quick AND simple process, thereby speeding up the daily tasks requiring the use of paper. Any system used should not only appear logical to the compiler but must be clear enough for deputies to use during, say, holidays or sickness. Equally the system should be in a format that any eventual successor to your post can recover information which will assist him in his first few months of running the golf course.

Organisation

The filing cabinet sits in front of you with an inviting array of files waiting to be filled. Don't panic! Sit down and think about the tasks carried out on the course and the paperwork involved with each task. Jot down notes and headings for collective tasks. Such a list may include materials, machinery and manpower. Within these main headings all the basic works can be inserted - in separate files if necessary. The purpose of separation to this fine degree is primarily for ease of access, ensuring that when asked a question you can go straight to the appropriate file for the answer. Your filing system may seem logical to you and you may be able to find individual items in seconds. However, others may not think in the same way and could need assistance to locate the information they require.

Perhaps the most important reasons for keeping records are to facilitate the management of the maintenance budget and to aid the organisation of the management programme. Organisation and efficiency are two key words, for without them a records system will have little value and an inefficient and poorly organised greenkeeper does not get the job

done. An unkempt, disorderly records system says as much about the greenkeeper as an untidy machinery shed.

The records system

The exact order and division of paperwork is an individual thing, though headings for main or primary files should be fairly universal. In this way the TRIMS computer package highlights the main categories for a record system. Within each main heading the information can be split into sub or secondary files. In most cases this is all the division necessary, but for more complex information, tertiary files and beyond may have to be prepared for ease of access to specific information. Let's consider the main headings and the information that should be stored within them.

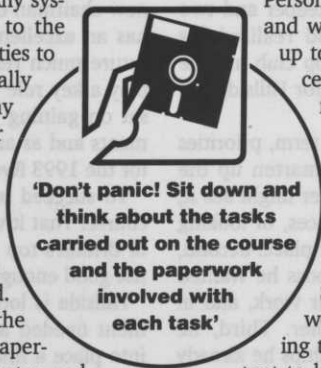
Work schedule

The daily work schedule is often monitored on a wall chart planner or diary. This is all well and good as an open display of intent, and is useful to recall the exact timing of works. However, once the year has come to an end, a more permanent and less bulky record of the year's work should be kept.

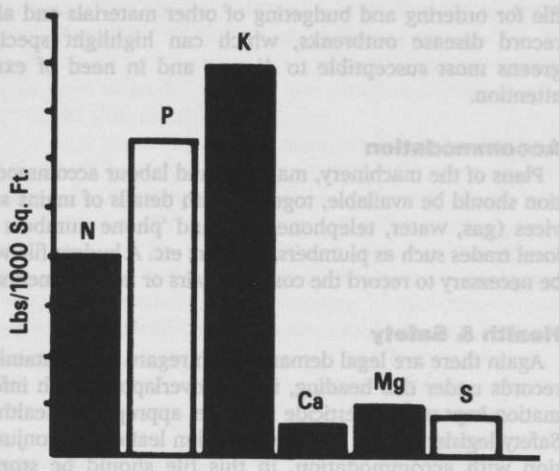
Personal experience is only valuable if it is reliable; and writing information down is an essential back-up to memory. Obviously your understudy or successor can also make use of information in this form. This file should contain information to help plan the maintenance workload, not only day to day, but forward planning in terms of months and even years. Details should include the operations necessary throughout the year on areas of the course - including frequency and a brief description.

Such records not only aid in planning future work but can be a useful reference to determining the effectiveness of past practices. It is important to keep a record of golfing commitments for the

year - i. e. competitions and society play - so that the greenkeeping work can be planned accordingly - with the golfing programme agreed at the start of each year between the head greenkeeper and the club and setting aside adequate time for routine and occasional disruptive maintenance practices. Having such a record enables all staff to be aware of what is expected from them. Long term planning is most important and a 5 or 10 year plan should be formalised and agreed within the Club. This should detail on-going maintenance, together with proposals for construction works (tee enlargement, bunker work, etc) and forward budget plans, perhaps even a copy of STRI reports! In such a file it is useful to keep a record on weather conditions. All Clubs should have access to information on daily rainfall, ambient and soil temperature readings and also record frost days and waterlogged green days.



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'Keep a record of staff throughout the year, which will help pin-point future busy periods and aid plans for early recruitment'

dates for replacement. In the latter respect a record of demos. with comments on performance is useful. Maintaining a well ordered list of machinery should ensure that all equipment is in working order and serve to remind of in-house maintenance schedules and dates for off-site servicing. Planning service timing is important, with problems developing if, for example, all greens mowing machinery is off site at the same time. With the name of each unit, record serial and engine numbers so that parts may be ordered more easily and accurately. Sources and cost of hire equipment should also be stored.

Irrigation

It is sensible to use a separate file for irrigation. A copy of the original layout and subsequent additions should be stored. It is not only important to know when the system is to be commissioned or shut-down and drained, but also for noting faults (where, when, how) and how they were rectified. Record the areas on greens/tees not adequately covered so that you know where hand watering should be concentrated, and where the system might be up-dated. Also record water quantities and time spent watering through the automatic and/or manual sprinklers.

Materials

Not only obvious items like fertiliser, top dressing, sand, seed, turf and wetting agent but also diesel; petrol; oil and sundries such as flags, tee boxes and litter bins. Keep a record of new stock, what is used and when, dates for re-ordering. It is important to know exactly what has been used so that you may re-order if successful or seek alterna-

● Continued overleaf

Manpower

Use in conjunction with the Work Schedule file to make sure you are getting the best out of the available manning levels, for man management and efficient labour utilisation are key areas for head greenkeepers wishing to get the best from their course. Keep a record of permanent and temporary staff through the year, which will help pin-point future busy periods and aid plans for early recruitment and thus avoid undue staff stress factors. Overtime, holidays and other personal data should be recorded, together with personal details - strengths and weaknesses, training and education - all are important.

Equipment

Detailed information must be kept on machinery, with information on the stock, purchase date, service, repairs etc. together with comments on performance and proposed

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More than just efficiency – certain



A well-ordered set of records improves the efficiency of the course management programme

tives if not. Analysis of materials, e.g. top dressing, fertiliser, plus chemical analysis of topsoil from greens, should also be kept. Work out how much fertiliser or dressing is required per unit (e.g. green) at the more common application rates and record these figures – easier than re-calculating for each application or when re-ordering.

Pesticides

Under the COSHH Regulations 1988 it is a legal necessity to keep detailed records on all pesticides and other materials used. With an ever increasing importance placed on the safe use of pesticides they deserve to be kept in a separate file. Information leaflets on legislation and how it affects you should be stored, with details of application rates and dilution factors for regularly used materials. Calibration records for all spraying equipment are essential, together with a diary detailing pesticide use around the course. Keep a stock

file for ordering and budgeting of other materials and also record disease outbreaks, which can highlight specific greens most susceptible to disease and in need of extra attention.

Accommodation

Plans of the machinery, materials and labour accommodation should be available, together with details of mains services (gas, water, telephone etc.) and 'phone numbers of local trades such as plumbers, builders etc. A budget file will be necessary to record the cost of repairs or improvements.

Health & Safety

Again there are legal demands with regard to maintaining records under this heading, in part overlapping with information kept within pesticide files, i. e. appropriate Health & Safety legislation and other information leaflets. In conjunction with accommodation, in this file should be stored duplicate information on the siting of emergency equipment and a record of protective clothing, its condition and use. Keep the 'phone number of doctor, hospital, police and fire service handy and that of the local Health & Safety Executive.

Words and Pictures

It is all well and good keeping records in this way, but they must be used to your advantage. Obviously, some record keeping such as budgets and pesticide information is a necessity, whilst other material can also be of great value but needs to be used to its full potential.

Records can be stored in a more legible way if documents are typed. You may be able to decipher your own handwriting but chances are no one else will! Ideally you should have access to a typist in the club secretary's office and should keep a record of all communications between yourself and your contact (secretary, green chairman et al) within the

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record-keeping 'a legal requirement'

clubhouse. This should include minutes of meetings you are privy to, memos from/to club contact and information provided by you to the general membership via the notice board. You never know when you might have to justify yourself and dated confirmation of agreed practices could work in your favour.

As a high proportion of the main file headings hold budget information, it may be a good idea to create a separate main budget file that collates all disseminated information. At the present time there are a limited number of head greenkeepers actively involved in the decision making process for formulating a budget, though thankfully we see more and more each year. Only the man doing the job can have comprehensive knowledge of forecasting budget requirements. Even those greenkeepers who are simply allocated a budget will find life a lot easier if detailed records are kept and far better than having to explain to a finance chairman why a maintenance budget is over-spent. In such a situation records will prove invaluable in revealing cash inadequacies for work that must be done, along with extras initiated by the green committee!

Facts and figures are all very well, but unless they are presented in an intelligent and simple format much of their impact will be lost. This is particularly true of budget information, where producing reams of numbers will do nothing to convince management that the green staff is under-funded or under-manned. A visual and easy to appraise presentation might be in the form of a graph or diagram. Pie charts, histograms, scatter and line graphs can exhibit diverse information that is immediate and clear, and can be used to present information in a concise way. As an example, if a graph shows a trend of lowering pH and potash levels, but stable phosphate, it is an aid to manage fertiliser and top dressing inputs. Scatter diagrams of disease incidence can pin-point susceptible greens and times or weather patterns when outbreaks are likely.

In such instances graphs copied can be overlaid on an overhead projection sheet to show connection between, say, the weather and outbreaks of disease.

For the record...

In this article, hopefully, one can appreciate the importance of keeping a well ordered set of records in one's bid to improve the efficiency of the course management programme. Within each main title there is great scope for producing sub-files, but there is little point in separating records in main categories if all the segregated information is then thrown into a single file in no particular order.

What is shown here is purely a personal review and your records system must be designed by you, for you are the one that has to understand and use it. The outline above is a suggested format of how you might organise all the paperwork that is part and parcel of greenkeeping today. The order in which you file is predetermined on computer packages; in a filing cabinet the choice is yours.

There is likely to be so much information that it is best to keep closely related main file headings together, rather than use a convention alphabetical order. There may be overlapping, or repetition, but this is no bad thing as cross referencing information not only speeds up the process but makes your system more user-friendly for others. Duplication of information is useful, especially if vital information is stored in two separate places. Is it worth risking loss of essential paperwork when a filing cabinet burns for the sake of taking photocopies or listing addresses in a book? Computer packages emphasise the importance of such a back-up, storing information on both hard and floppy disk. If there is any duplication of information remember to change all references if making alterations. Having different addresses for the same company is going to mean a 50% chance of getting no reply!

In addition to all this information filed away, we have discussed the merits of keeping a diary or wall chart planner. It will be more convenient to have a desk-top address book which can be quickly flipped open than wading through files in a record system. At the end of the day, keeping good records is for your own benefit. A deal of time is now spent by head greenkeepers coping with paperwork and this time will be minimised if you know exactly where information is kept.



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