

Gordon Bennington suggests some useful tips to take your watering system into winter

Winter water shutdown

The summer has gone, the irrigation system no longer needed. Will you forget it? Probably, but you shouldn't! The system has cost valuable Club funds to install and maintain and is a vital management tool every year, dry or not so dry.

If we ignore the system now, the Club will inevitably spend more on maintenance next year. If the system is properly wintered down and checked through, such action will limit future expenditure on maintenance and it will be there waiting, fully operational when we need it next spring!

What work should we, as responsible greenkeepers, arrange to be done now and throughout the winter to ensure we start next season with a fully operational and satisfactory scheme?

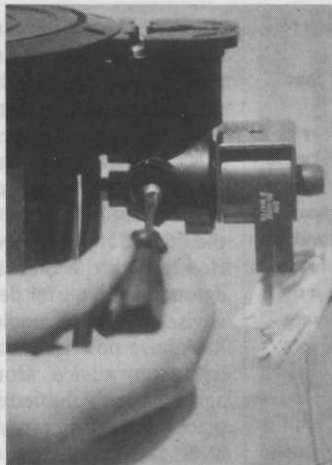
Storage facility, controller and control cable, pipeline, solenoids and sprinklers – all require attention; and the main points to look for are as follows:

Storage: If your storage is an above ground galvanised, fibreglass or polyethylene type, close off the water supply whilst making sure to drain the supply line back to a position where it will not freeze, or ensure it has been adequately lagged. Unless the tank is used as a fire fighting water supply, drain it and take the opportunity of removing any silt or debris which may have accumulated. Check the liner and waterproof seams and joints for condition. If they are in anyway suspect, make arrangements to have them attended to.

If your water supply is a river or lake, make sure you remove the suction pipe from the water. This will prevent it from freezing, possibly even being washed away, and will reduce deterioration to the suction pipe itself.

Pump station: Check that the pumphouse is safe and vandalproof for the winter. Mindless persons can often cause more damage than the worst frost or lightning strike. All types of pumps used in golf course irrigation need draining down if there is the slightest risk of frost. Pump castings do not tolerate water being frozen within them and can possibly crack.

Pumps and motors should be checked for performance and wear and the greenkeeper should request an annual check from his irrigation equipment supplier. Do this now rather than later, when every other client will be looking for urgent attention.



A typical solenoid coil which could eventually break down pulling too much current

Did the pump seem to be working as it should? Have any of your staff mentioned a drop-off in pump performance? If so, mention this to the pump engineer, as it could help him to locate the particular problem more quickly. Always isolate the electricity to the pumps, open all valves and give them a turn from time to time during the winter.

Controllers: We often forget these essential devices. First, should we switch the controller off? Some manufacturers would prefer to leave the controllers powered to ensure there is no long-term damage due to condensation etc., even if the pumphouse is heated. It may help to remove any fuses fitted to the course wiring to minimise any possible lightning damage due to winter storms. If the pumphouse itself needs attention in order to prevent rainwater finding its way to the controller and the electrics in general – do something about it now.

On course electric cable: Have the course low voltage electrics checked out by your supplier for current leakage when he carries out any other work during the winter, unless your system provides you with a status report.

Pipelines: One of the jobs we know we need to do, know we should do and often leave too late, is to open the drain valves and release the water from the pipeline system. Let as much water out as possible, then close the valves to approximately 1/4" (6mm) opening. This will prevent our rodent friends from using the drained pipe as a winter home – a favourite place for many.

Make a note of the points across the course where you have noticed

leaks during the season and plan to do something about them now, not later when the lines are drained down. If you have any doubt that the pipeline is not fully drained in places where it may be exposed, ensure it is properly lagged against frost damage.

Solenoid valves and sprinklers: If you had operational problems during the season with solenoids or sprinklers, arrange to resolve them now. Diaphragms in solenoids will eventually fatigue and require replacing, coils and coil pins can wear, with coils drawing too much current and coil pin not seating correctly. Have the coils checked by your supplier at the same time as he is checking the course wiring as this can often be a single operation.

Sprinkler seals may have become worn and be leaking. Remove the sprinkler inserts and replace the seals, checking the springs at the same time, whilst cleaning the trash filters and checking the nozzles for excessive wear. Make sure the pop-up drain holes are clear.

Hoses: If you use auxiliary hand

watering or sprinkler feed hoses, remember that they also should be drained out, coiled up and placed in a dry, preferably dark, location. You may need one during the winter and when you do it could be full of ice, hidden under grass and knotted up into the bargain.

In summary: Do not forget the system. Do the checks now and plan the repairs and maintenance through the winter. If you are planning improvements, talk to your suppliers immediately and negotiate your plans early. If you choose not to assess the state of your irrigation system as suggested, be sure to add a significant increase to your maintenance budget for 1992. You will certainly need it!

● The author, Gordon Bennington, is General Manager of the Rainbird Division of Wright Rain Limited.

● Readers should note that a two day BIGGA education workshop on irrigation will be presented at The Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate, on January 20th and 21st 1992, presented by Robin Hume of the British Turf and Landscape Irrigation Association.

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