

WHAT THE R&A SAY – BE PREPARED FOR CHANGE

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The R&A promotes greater sustainability in the way we develop and maintain our golf courses. One of the key elements toward achieving this aim is the ability to be able to adapt to changing circumstances and climate change is, probably, one of the greatest challenges facing the game around the world. In the UK, we are unlikely to witness the most severe extremes that climate change may bring about elsewhere, e.g. the desertification of southern Europe, but the predictions suggest that we will witness warmer and drier summers, wetter and milder winters and more storms. What strategy can courses in the UK adopt to try and counter these effects?

One of the best means of combating any form of turf stress, and wildly fluctuating weather patterns certainly produce this, is to promote healthy turf. This means working on the growing environment to produce dry, firm surfaces with ample access to light and air movement. Links tend to benefit from nature's gifts in this regard and the short DVD, "Come rain, come shine", which is available to view at www.bestcourseforgolf.org, demonstrates how

perfecting firm surfaces which drain well helped present courses fit for an Open Championship despite the opposite extremes of weather witnessed at Hoylake in 2006 and Carnoustie in 2007. Improving drainage to create drier turf is feasible in most situations, through construction and maintenance techniques. This will require greater investment for some than for others but the very survival of courses which do not currently perform well in wetter weather may depend on positive action in this regard. Drier courses mean more play and less damage from traffic, bringing in greater revenue. Drier turf generally means better turf, in terms of its health, resistance to disease, and species composition. The type of turf you can develop to drier surfaces will not only survive wet periods in good order but will also tolerate drier conditions without recourse to heavy irrigation, and water scarcity and cost could well impact on your ability to irrigate in future heatwaves. Courses may have to be more inventive when it comes to dealing with Biblical-scale rains, looking to architectural changes to susceptible parts of the course to provide water holding ditches and ponds and utilising the spoil to raise in-play areas, this water circulation process providing a valuable source for irrigation in drier times as can storm water collection. Case studies on water management systems are available on the R&A website.

The R&A is developing systems that will help course managers to monitor, predict and proactively address the challenges that lie ahead:

- The benchmarking service at bestcourseforgolf.org which helps the course manager assess the impact of changing weather on the course and the effect maintenance has on dealing with problems, in terms of turf quality, playing quality and cost. This service is available now, free of charge, to courses registered to the site. It can be used as part of a risk assessment analysis, protecting the course and its management against the changing climate and regulations whose impact will be climate-related, e.g. water and pesticides
- Tools to objectively measure sward composition and playing quality so that you can monitor performance and adjust maintenance procedures to ensure that the playing experience is the best it can be, whatever the weather

No-one can guarantee what weather we are going to experience in 20, 50 or 100 years time. The best predictions suggest that we will see much greater extremes of heat, drought and rainfall at various times of the year, and we are already witnessing more unpredictable weather. Prepare for change and you will be in a better position to present the golf course well, sustaining your business in a more environmentally sound way and, thereby, securing the future of the game for generations to come.