





Green Credit Where it is Due

Greenkeepers everywhere are under pressure to do more with less. The summer of 2009 is expected to feature heatwaves, water shortages and cash-flow problems. The Golf Environment Organisation (GEO) can't promise quick fixes for the major issues of the day, but it is empowering Course Managers everywhere to keep environmental performance on the agenda through difficult times.



With the launch of its new site - www.golfenvironment.org - GEO has firmly established its position as the leading source of free environmental knowledge and guidance for industry professionals. But while the organisation has served up useful websites in the past, this time around something is very different.

“Connecting golf course managers with technical information has only ever been half the story. While industry publications, award schemes and educational events do an excellent job of raising awareness within the sector; we’re all guilty of failing to represent our good work to the rest of the world,” said GEO Chief Executive, Jonathan Smith.

“People within golf, and those close to it, are fully aware that baseline environmental performance in the sector is extremely high, certainly far in advance of that which is appreciated by the general public, and often golf club members themselves.

“With the launch of GEO Certification this is all set to change. Greenkeepers everywhere now have access to an efficient and user-friendly tool that enables them to clearly communicate exactly how they are managing their natural resource. This creates a brand new opportunity to improve dramatically

the reputations of individual clubs, and with widespread participation, the industry as a whole.

“And the best news is that registering with the programme – and putting your golf facility onto the GEO Certification map – is completely free of charge,” explained Jonathan.

Archie Dunn, Head Greenkeeper at Auchterarder Golf Club published his Registration Report in June 2009.

“After taking a few minutes to set up an account, our management team spent an hour here and an hour there answering GEO’s simple registration questions. We also uploaded an environmental policy document and received some writing assistance from our long-time environmental adviser. All in all this process took around five hours over the course of three weeks,” said Archie.

“The questions we had to answer progressed clearly through issues such as nature, landscape, water, turf, waste, energy, education and management planning. The information and resources available on GEO’s website are also structured in the same way. It was very easy to find answers for any of the questions we had.

“After pressing the button to submit our application, someone from GEO’s certification team double checked our answers for

The Certification Process



ACTION	TIMESCALE	COST
Register on-line	½ day	FREE
Improve environmental management	Up to 3 years	Staff Time
Apply for certification on-line	1 day	€150
Evaluation from Accredited Verifier	1 day	€600 - €1400
Apply for re-certification	Every 3 years	Same as above

completeness. The application was then accepted and a great looking report was automatically generated. It's available for anyone to read on GEO's website and will remain there until June 2012, or until we become fully certified and it's replaced by our certification report.

"Since completing registration we have received a "Certificate of Participation" which is now framed and displayed in our clubhouse. We also adapted a template press release from GEO and have distributed it through local media, advising the local community of our participation in the programme.

"All in all the feedback has been great and our members are very interested in the programme. In fact, many of them have visited our page on GEO's website and voiced their surprise at all the huge variety of expertise required to maintain our golf course to the standard that we do.

"Considering this was all free of charge, and took around half a day to complete, it has been a really worthwhile project so far," added Archie.

While preparing The Twenty Ten Course at Celtic Manor for tour-

Certification Outcomes

Accepted

Certification report published; verifiers report published; certified status promoted on GEO website

Pending

Verifier / GEO provides feedback on improvements necessary for award of certification. Re-verification visit required only in extreme circumstances.

Rejected

Legal non-compliance or failure to meet published criteria. Nothing will be published. GEO's objective is not to name and shame.

nament play presents a different challenge, Director of Golf Courses, Jim McKenzie, also found the registration process rewarding.

"After setting up our account we decided to separate the Celtic Manor golf courses into two applications: one for The Twenty Ten Course, and another covering the Montgomerie and Roman Road courses. GEO will actually certify up to 54 holes under a single application, but given the European Tour status of The Twenty Ten we thought it would be best to maintain two separate certifications.

"Although the standards of environmental management across The Celtic Manor Resort are already very high, registering The Twenty Ten Course has been an informative process. GEO has clearly spent a great deal of time fine-tuning the structure of the programme and has helped my team focus on priority issues and avoid expending time and effort on less significant activities.

"Effectively communicating our environmental performance is very important to Celtic Manor. We're offering a great product, and setting out to achieve the standards required for GEO Certification will only make it better. Our customers want to know that their enjoyment of the game does not carry hidden environmental costs. Promoting ourselves as a GEO Certified golf facility lets everyone know we're managing our environmental responsibility, and if they're interested, lets them see exactly how we're achieving that."

Having worked with the website during its preview stage, Stig Persson – General Manager of Ljunghusens Golfklubb and Chairman of FEGGA – has seen the system mature into a polished product.

"Representing Ljunghusens' environmental work through GEO's website was remarkably efficient. It enabled our management team to constructively collaborate and integrated into our workflow with ease," said Stig

"We applied for certification in mid May and appointed Marten Wallberg, a GEO Accredited Verifier based in Sweden to come out and evaluate our work. During the course of his one-day visit we received a great deal of valuable insight and have established achievable targets for re-certification in 2012.

"No matter the sophistication of any existing environmental programmes, working through GEO's free registration process will certainly help greenkeepers and club managers to structure and prioritise their work - a significant benefit in difficult economic times.

"We've been actively promoting our GEO Certified status in the local community and have been directing people to view our page on GEO's site. The award has actually generated a great deal of interest around the country."

Benjamin Warren, GEO's Director of Communications, is receiving a great deal of positive feedback from clubs that have completed the registration process.

"More often than not environmental management is common sense



www.golfenvironment.org/auchterarder
www.golfenvironment.org/thetwentyten
www.golfenvironment.org/ljunghusens

ABOVE: Celtic Manor have put themselves on the environmental map

ABOVE LEFT / PREVIOUS SPREAD: GEO Certification makes sense of managing complex environments

BELOW LEFT: Not just on-line - registered and certified participants receive certificates from GEO

management. GEO Certification has been carefully crafted to enable course managers to quickly identify the strengths and weaknesses of their existing programmes, drive on with cost saving initiatives and easily identify priority areas for improvement," he said.

"Whether a golf club is fortunate enough to receive free advisory through bodies such as the Scottish Golf Environment Group, or is retaining the services of an independent environmental consultant, simply working through the system will help to ensure that any support is engaged as effectively as possible.

"While some of the registrations on the site are very comprehensive – Loch Lomond and Celtic Manor, for example – this should not be considered intimidating. It's only natural that high profile, complex sites will be publishing large and complex registration reports. The key is just to create an account and get started. Publishing an environmental policy and making a simple commitment to responsible management is the first step. GEO will not be refusing registrations on the basis that existing environmental programmes lack sophistication. These published reports can actually be used to raise awareness amongst members and co-workers, frame further actions and drive on performance.

"We can state with complete confidence that GEO Certification is the most efficient, most credible and most cost-effective environmental certification for golf. This truly is an opportunity for course managers everywhere to put their golf club on the environmental map."

