

Watering your “garden”

Graeme Francis, Sports Sales Manager, at Revaho UK, shares with us his stance over the recent Drought Order sweeping the country

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So here we are again. Water companies have put in place water use restrictions that include watering a “garden” using a hosepipe.

The “garden” in question includes, amongst others “an area of grass used for sports or recreation,” and the term hosepipe appears to cover a plethora of irrigation equipment that can include static and pop-up sprinklers. If you are hosting a national or international event you are exempt, however all other golf courses supplied by the water companies imposing the restrictions, are probably subject to the hose ban.

If your course is irrigated using water from the potable supply and is fed into a storage tank you cannot irrigate. And at the moment there seems little chance that this will change during the 2012 golf course irrigation season.

Already we have seen the finger pointing at the golf industry as an excessive user of water and some of the comments made about turf not needing to be watered after 28 days and recommendations to give the course a good soak while you can, demonstrate a lack of understanding by outside bodies of the role of irrigation in the long term management of golf courses.

You might be reading this and thinking that because you have a licence to abstract from a borehole or lake you could be unaffected by water shortage. Well maybe, however, at some point, restric-

tions could be placed on using any water for golf course management. Many abstraction licences contain a Hands off Flow condition which can be invoked to reduce or stop water being taken and the Environment Agency can use The Water Resources Act 1991 to restrict abstraction if required.

The use of automatic irrigation systems on golf courses in the UK goes back to the late 1960’s and for many years the turfgrass irrigation industry worked hard to raise design and installation standards by offering training courses focusing on new system provision.

This was extremely successful and many of the industry’s key personnel benefited from the training. Since that time automatic irrigation has become considered an essential management tool by Course Managers.

So is enough being done today to provide greenkeepers with the knowledge they need to use their systems to the optimum?

There are still some excellent courses being run by respected industry figures for course management personnel, however how many really understand the water use implications of poor uniformity of distribution of water, poor sprinkler spacing or worn nozzles?

Has enough been done to train course managers how to use controllers to schedule golf irrigation taking into consideration such factors as plant available water, manageable depletion and calculation

of run time multipliers? I suggest the answer to these questions is no.

Golf is, and unfortunately will continue to be, a soft target and seen as a demon when it comes to water use.

We know it’s unjustified, however perhaps we need to look at how we can demonstrate our water resource management, both for political and practical reasons. Being able to show the processes that course managers undertake to use water efficiency will bring public relations benefits.

It will also be important when discussing or negotiating with water providers whilst attempting to secure the quantities of water required to maintain the course to appropriate standards. A reasoned argument based on applied water management records and proof of having carried out other analytical water use assessments such as an irrigation audit will create a much stronger position when explaining water needs.

The water restrictions of 2012 are another wake-up call for the golf industry. There’s no doubt that the constraints placed on golf in relation to water availability will increase.

Now is the time to ensure every Course Manager and Head Greenkeeper has all the knowledge he or she needs to ensure both that they can get the water that’s required and also can optimise its use. Compliment the art of greenkeeping with the science of water management.

