

MAGCS DIRECTORS COLUMN

“Spreadin’ the Wear”

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Hardly a movement should be made on a golf course unless some consideration is given to spreading wear or traffic patterns. Turfgrass wear, soil compaction, soil displacement, turf removal or any combination of the four are our major sources of problems in maintaining quality golfing turf. The wear problems are enhanced as weather conditions reach extremes, as play increases, under poor drainage, and when the time allowed for recovery from a wear condition is limited. When uncontrolled, foot traffic, golf club damage, golf ball damage, cart traffic or any golf course maintenance equipment operation can get out of hand and accelerate turf grass damage. Maintenance programs, cultural practices, renovation operations and rebuilding projects are all influenced by wear. We are always looking for a better method of reducing wear, promoting recovery from wear and ultimately preventing damage from wear completely.

Let’s review a few wear problems and methods of coping with golf course traffic. Traffic control must begin at the locker room door. The first signs of turfgrass deterioration often appear next to the walkway leading to the first tee. Golfers wearing spiked shoes tend to avoid walking on a hard surfaced path if there is grass to walk on nearby. Often along an unbordered path a secondary path worn from foot traffic develops along side. One method of correction is landscaping along the pathway. It can be simple as a border of fuchsias or more elaborate by using a hedge planting along the path. Low curbing or a low rope and stake arrangement are of little use because they are too easily stepped over.

If there is one area on the entire golf course we would like to keep in the best of conditions at all times, it is the first tee. After all this is the area where a golfer gains his first impression of golf course conditions. The first tee can easily become the most troublesome to maintain if traffic is not controlled. The problems are often caused by the waiting of foursomes to tee off, signing up for golf events and activities such as warming up and practice swinging. Much of the additional traffic can be averted by communication with the Pro Shop staff. Avoid setting a table on the teeing surface for sign up of golf events and suggest that warm up activities and practice swings be directed to the practice range. The entrance to the first tee is often another problem area. Where golfers seem to always enter in the same location wear soon develops. Here a decorative stake and chain arrangement may be used to vary the entrance way. It is a must to move the entrance daily or the wear can be worse than no direction at all.

The next area where traffic problems develop is at the end of the cart path at the first tee. Even though the end of the path was flared to vary the exit, people tend to always exit in the same area unless directed otherwise. Methods of spreading the wear can be as simple as a painted 4 by 4 moved daily to route the exit. Flower planters look better and can serve the same purpose. Both require attention daily to be effective. Often the wear at the end of the path is caused by poor drainage and excessive runoff. Especially, if the path ends on the low end of

a slope, rain and irrigation water keep the exit wet. One solution to the problem is to use plastic egg crating type material such as Grasscel blocks at the end of the hard surfaced path. The material when laid over sand or gravel will correct the drainage and excess water problem. Sod can be rolled into the blocks and the area appears as sod. But the wear is absorbed by the crating material, not the turf or soil. Increased maintenance on heavy traffic turf areas also aid in the wear tolerance. Fertilizing, irrigation and aerification of these areas help to reduce wear by producing a healthier turfgrass plant.

It is generally better to allow cart traffic complete freedom from the tee to the approach area of the green. But as conditions of stress develop, a decision must be made in regard to cart traffic control. Under wilt or wet conditions many opt to direct cart traffic to roughs only. Often by this action we trade one problem for another. Under heavy play or a few days of carts in rough only, one easily develops wear problems in the near rough area. The turf at rough height soon lies down in the direction of travel and besides producing a poor golf lie it creates a mowing problem. Reel type mowers will not pick up and cut the matted turf. Some have gone to rotary mowing these areas and found it to be the answer. Ropes and stakes have been used from tee to green and moved daily to spread the wear in the rough area.

The next heavy wear area occurs around the greens. A golfer on a cart has a tendency to drive as close to the greens as possible. Someday someone is sure to report catching a golfer on the green in a cart attempting to putt. Most golf carts have decals suggesting that carts not be taken any closer than 30 feet off the green or be driven on slopes. Signs are generally not enough. Signs, ropes and stakes are often used across approaches and around greens to direct traffic. Besides being a nuisance to mowing operations, ropes and stakes take from the natural beauty of the golf course. Also, they never seem to stay in place; an hour after they have been straightened it always seems half of them have been knocked down. An alternative to ropes and stakes may be a painted line or a more permanent Roundup line around areas where golf carts should not be taken. It works with a good public relations program. Golfers soon learn to police each other and will correct one another when they see someone cross the line.

We now find ourselves at the second tee and another short cart path with the bottom of a slope as one edge. The area soon becomes unsightly because cart traffic keeps cutting into the slope. Here is an excellent location to use railroad tie curbing. They will keep the carts on the path and maintain an edge.

It is a fact; as rounds of golf play with golf carts increase, so does the number of unrepaired ball marks. Why? As a golfer is walking, he generally approaches the green on the line of flight of the golf ball, sees the ball mark and repairs it. A golfer on a cart will drive around the green as near as possible to his ball, thus forgets or never sees his ball mark nor repairs it. The problem seems to be getting worse. Signs on the golf carts and hole pins have little effect. All we can do is repair the ball marks before the green is mowed the next morning, too late for fast healing. Somehow golf etiquette must be stressed.

Today the demand for the best of playing conditions throughout the golfing season is greater than ever before. To meet the demand and survive the wear problems we must find

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more time for basic turfgrass management and cultural practices. Teeing areas must be utilized to the fullest, spreading the wear evenly and allowing ample time for recovery. It is a general tendency to leave too much room between tee markers. On most holes the heaviest wear occurs within six feet of the right or left marker, the rest of the teeing area receives little wear. By narrowing the tee marker width to 12 to 15 feet one can often double the rotation area and increase the turfgrass recovery time from three to six weeks. Soiling and seeding of divots should be a weekly operation, more often on par 3's. Some clubs have even gotten the golfer involved by providing buckets of soil and seed mix at the tee for divot repair. Others are aerifying problems areas more often; some are even sand topdressing tees to improve soil conditions. Unlike greens, tees seldom have an improved soil mix. Tees that are being rebuilt nowadays have. On most golf courses the size of the teeing area has not increased along with the increase in play. Where wear is severe and recovery time is limited because of size, sometimes the only answer is enlargement.

The days of seven, nine and eleven gang fairway mowing units are limited. Those using three and five gang mowing units and removing grass clippings have found the answer to fairway wear problems. More frequent aertification and more aerifier holes are in. Frequent soiling and seeding of driving area divots are in. The most interesting results found with the intensified maintenance and cultural practice programs is that the percentage of desirable turfgrass is increasing.

In summary, we must analyze our wear problems and formulate maintenance programs, cultural practices, renovation methods and rebuilding projects to reduce the wear damage potential. We must inform the golfer, our staffs and the Pro Shop operation of habits with high wear potential. Public relations is important. Common sense must be used with every program. The best designed pin placement program must be flexible, in that under wet conditions one should avoid placing a pin on a lower, wetter area of the green. We must say abreast of new techniques and put the highest effort toward better methods of "Spreadin the Wear".

Editor's note: Ken Zanzig has come up with a poem this month that really hits the nail on the head, on the feeling of many of us over our newsletter.

"The Bull Sheet"

Golden Words, I heard Today,
"THE BULL SHEET", is here to stay.
Never will It run or hide,
But Stand Tall and Burst with Pride.
It's served Our purpose, many Years,
Revealing knowledge gained through Tears.
Enlightening All, along the way,
Of the Hazards and Remedies of the Day.
Thank you, "BULL SHEET", refreshment sweet,
Thank you, for Your Monthly Treat.

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