



South Florida Sunshine



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The original theme of this magazine issue was irrigation. Water, being the primary ingredient for a successful irrigation system, has become the hottest issue of 1981. Water shortages, including previous and existing cutbacks, are said to be the rule rather than the exception in the 1980's and probably infinitely.

The last real shortage experienced in South Florida was in 1971. It was not as severe as the one we are now experiencing and according to South Florida Water Management officials it will take at least two years of above average rainfall to rectify our present problem. That is not to say that we won't continue to have problems.

The primary concern of South Florida Water Management is salt water intrusion. All solutions to problems are really aimed at preventing salt water intrusion. Most of the well fields that supply drinking water to South Florida are located within five miles of the coastline. Therefore, if more water is taken out of these wells than can be recharged by rain or eastward flowing canals, salt water can intrude into the wells that supply our drinking water.

Basically, the system works this way. The average rainfall in South Florida is 55"-60" a year. These rains can readily recharge well fields in the coastal areas. In times of less rain, such as we experience between December and June, well fields can be recharged by eastward flowing canals and rivers such as the Hillsboro Canal, C-14, C-13, New River, etc. These canals carry fresh water and runoff water eastward toward the sea. If these canals get low, South Florida Water Management can open gates in the conservation areas to the West of us and permit the higher water levels in these areas to recharge our eastward flowing canals.

As a backup system to the conservation areas, we have Lake Okeechobee. Higher water levels are usually present in the lakes and can be used to supply our canals when they get low.

What has been non-existent in these times of drought and even in our rainy season, June through December, are sufficient rains in the conservation areas and in Lake Okeechobee. We are experiencing sufficient coastal rains to supply our well fields, the Biscayne Aquifer and our canal systems. The big problem at present is that when the coastal rains diminish we have very little "backup water" to recharge our well fields. Hence, we have drought conditions and water restrictions.

From what I have heard, most golf courses fell under the 25% restriction imposed in May and were asked not to do

any daytime watering. This was not the most comfortable situation. However, it was bearable even if it did mean some inconvenience in the normal day to day maintenance of our golf courses.

We were not too far from a 50% water cutback, when sufficient rains began to fall to recharge our well fields and the 25% was reduced to 10%. What would have happened at 50% cutback is anyone's guess. I am led to believe by South Florida Water Management that no water would be permitted for landscape irrigation which includes golf courses. That's right — NONE — or at best very little.

This possibility poses an infinite number of problems. Who gets water, for what purpose, how much and when. Unfortunately, we don't really know the answers to the questions. However, it becomes obvious to me that golf courses need to come up with plans for coping with shortages. Education of South Florida Water Management of our needs and necessities, better record keeping, monitoring of our irrigation systems, impact of golf courses on the economy of South Florida and just a general willingness to become a part of the solution.

I would imagine when we start discussing who gets water and how much, there can be some very adamant discussions. When an individual's livelihood or profession is being threatened, there needs to be a great deal of facts, figures and just plain common sense abounding.

The turf industry is second in Florida only to citrus in our State's Agriculture economy. Without further research it is difficult to estimate the economic hardship that golf would have on our tourist oriented economy. The figure is undoubtedly monumental and would have far reaching effects. It is easy to say that tourists will not come to South Florida if they can't enjoy good golfing. If South Florida's golf courses do not survive, the economy would suffer severely.

It is very discomfoting to realize that this problem will be with us for some time and that solutions will take years to implement. We are behind on our solutions, but hopefully they can be resolved quickly.

Most golf courses will need to look into alternative sources of water. It is mind boggling to think we dump somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 million gallons of fresh water a day into the ocean in the form of sewage effluent in South Florida. That is 200 million gallons of fresh, usable water dumped into the salt water sea and lost forever. The city of St. Petersburg, Florida, presently has five golf courses on their sewage effluent system and not only do they make

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excellent use of fresh water, but annual nitrogen requirements have been reduced 25-30%. In addition, the water not consumed by the turfgrass plant is returned to the water table and can replenish well fields.

This last point in itself is noteworthy. With all the concrete and asphalt going up around us, golf courses at least provide thousands of acres that water can filter through and get back into the water table.

Waste is probably the #1 culprit. Irrigating, when not necessary, especially by the homeowner with the automatic sprinkler system, is a common practice. It would be difficult to compute actual consumption but no doubt home irrigation is one the largest consumers of drinking quality water.

General waste by individuals is a large scale problem. We use shower heads that waste water, water closets that use more water than they should. We let water run when we shave or brush our teeth, run it unnecessarily in food preparation and countless other wasteful ways. It seems a shame that everyone gets concerned about water waste after the fact.

It is a general belief that there will be water shortages nationwide for years to come, and only those who are well prepared and water conscious will endure shortages with the least amount of discomfort and hardship.

Naturally, superintendents are highly concerned about their golf courses. Our livelihoods depend on ample water, and we are judged, however unfortunately, by the amount

of lush greenery we produce. Certain amounts of that "lush greenery" may diminish due to the conditions which have presented themselves.

I think that it is going to take a concentrated effort by the Superintendent's Associations and other turf related organizations and concerns to develop ways of dealing with water shortages, educating and co-operating with water management officials and the education of both the golfing and non-golfing public. We can all do our part to minimize potentially disastrous consequences in the turf industry. ■

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