

Treasure Coast "Tide"ings

Electronic Communication

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The use of extensive electronic communication systems are rapidly increasing in popularity in golf course maintenance operations. These systems can vary from one way telephone activated beepers, to large UHF and VHF base stations linked with hand held portable radios and beepers.

The extensiveness of a system varies on the size, scope and terrain of a particular operation. Mariner Sands Country Club is an example of where an extensive communication system is essential. They have a 36 hole golf facility, where few holes are visible from one another, a large landscape maintenance operation, an in house security staff and a construction department. Supervision of an operation this expansive would be extremely difficult without electronic communication. Mariner Sand's system consists of two separate VHF base stations, one servicing golf and landscape maintenance and the other for security and construction departments. Hand held portables are carried by department heads and key personnel in each department. Each portable radio and base station is equipped with two frequencies allowing interdepartment communication without radio chatter from other departments or by pushing a switch, cross department communication is allowed.

Electronic communication can be an effective tool on most any golf course, regardless of size. A small 18 hole facility with many holes visible from one another may not need electronic communication for supervision's sake, but any club can use it for irrigation repair work, summoning a mechanic to repair broken equipment on the course and contacting the superintendent for instructions or for emergencies. The size of the communication system will vary by the size of the facility and what the club can afford. Modern VHF and UHF systems can vary in price from several hundred dollars for portables, to several thousand dollars for base stations, portables and beepers.

Radio technology has advanced tremendously in the last decade. The days of walkie talkies on citizen's band frequencies with voice distortion and constant interference by others are gone. Today's "portables" have excellent voice quality and work on UHF and VHF frequencies, which virtually eliminates interference from other radio users. Technology is also reducing the size of portables, there are sets on the market now roughly the

size of a cigarette pack with the same range and features of much larger hand held units. Most modern systems are available in both UHF and VHF. While some clubs in our area are using UHF systems, VHF is by far the most popular. Statistically UHF systems have superior range over VHF but UHF has difficulty working through pine trees.

Pine needles are approximately the same length as the UHF wave length and tend to absorb the signal. This generally makes UHF a poor choice in this part of Florida. Clubs in our area using VHF systems report an effective range of 2 to 4 miles, depending on weather.

The need and effectiveness of an electronic communication system is highly dependent on interpersonal or "face to face" communication. The more effective a manager is in giving instructions before a job begins reduces the need for radio communication during the operation. Radios can become a poor substitute for face to face communication. Radio messages are too easily misunderstood, not to mention that hand gestures, drawings and other visual aids cannot be used on radio.

A golf course superintendent is generally a very difficult person to get in touch with, either in person or on the telephone. When calling a superintendent you usually get the same message, "he's out on the golf course. I don't know when he will be back in," or possibly no answer at all. Other superintendents know why this occurs but most professional business people consider this lack of communication intolerable.

Radio communication systems are most assuredly something that is on the increase in the golf course market. In years to come many superintendents may look back and wonder how they ever managed without them. ■

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