

*Are you
ready?*

Crunch time nearing

In a column in March I warned of pending legislation that would require all golf courses (now 460) within the South Florida Water Management District to reduce their use of potable water by 80 percent and contract with local utilities to purchase reclaimed water for their irrigation needs.

It is expected this proposal will become the blueprint for Florida's other water districts and possibly other states facing water supply problems.

After attending the final public workshop on this matter on July 3, I regret to report the proposal will probably take effect in November.

Utility companies will then have two years to develop their re-use programs. These programs hinge upon golf courses and other end users signing contracts for the purchase of reclaimed water. If recent contract proposals are any indication, utility companies have already demonstrated the intent to recover all costs from the end users.

A fair estimate of the cost for a golf course to pump its own water out of the ground is between four cents and five cents per thousand gallons. Golf courses throughout the state that are using reclaimed water pay an average of 17 cents per thousand.

I have seen a contract proposal from the Stuart area calling for 40 cents per thousand, and have heard of one for 50 cents per thousand.

Who knows how high it could go once the bureaucratic tentacles catch hold and golf courses have no choice of water sources?

Using my own course as an example of the potential additional cost of using this water, let me illustrate my concern.

My water permit allows me to withdraw up to 77.8 million gallons of water a year. If I were to use my allocation at 40 cents per thousand gallons, it would cost \$31,120 a year on top of other costs, which assuredly will go up to accommodate the use of this inferior water.

The quality of reclaimed water varies from one area to another, but one constant seems to be high levels of salts and heavy metals. Both are detrimental to golf turf. Corrective measures to counteract their effects could cost more than the water.

Knowing a little about the mentality of golf course neighborhoods, I also predict a problem with those walking or jogging the course at night. Add the expense of a fence or other means of security to keep all the people off the course at night during irrigation and the cost mounts up.

For all this effort and expense, there is only one tangible benefit that I can see for golf courses: an inferior source of water will be available during times when no other source can be obtained.

Sadly, our \$5.5 billion statewide golf industry has less influence on policy-makers than a vocal group of condo commandos.

Golf courses did not create the water crisis, but they are being called upon to solve it. Because a golf course is such an effective mechanism for the recharge of ground-water supplies, and because it already has the infrastructure for the disposal of reclaimed water, officials naturally look at golf courses as the very best means available to recycle water and replenish ground-water supplies.

In some densely populated urban areas, golf courses are the only available recharge areas for local shallow aquifers. Add to this the cleansing effect of golf turf and you see why water officials are drooling over the prospect of having golf courses use wastewater.

Having these wonderful advantages to offer for the solution of a water problem that we all create, golf courses — and this really means golfers — are rewarded by being asked to foot the entire bill.

The perception is that we use a lot of water. We apply a lot, but most returns to the groundwater supplies. We estimate as much as 10 times as much water returns to the aquifer as we draw out for irrigation.

The water management district estimates that any given golf course in South Florida will apply 1.25 inches of water in a typical week while a home owner will apply 5.5 to 6 inches. It is this kind of waste and inefficiency and the runoff from our concrete and asphalt jungles that have created the water problem, not the golf course that recycles water by filtering it and returning it to the aquifer.

The utility companies will assuredly attempt the "divide and conquer" tactic, but don't buckle under to the pressure. My only suggestion for now is to refuse to sign any contracts for reclaimed water.

If we in the golf industry just roll over and accept this, we deserve the economic burden foisted upon us. But, we all have a stake in this and should fight it together. There is still time.

Mark My Words



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