



All Things Considered...

How Green Is Your Golf Course?

BY JAMES T. SNOW

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The answer to this question depends on how you define the word "green." But first, let me tell you what today's politically correct answer should be. Today's courses ought to be very green, yet not so very green, both at the same time!

Confused? Let's look at a couple of definitions of the word green, and perhaps the previous statement will become more clear.

First of all, environmentalists use the word green to identify organizations, people, corporations, policies, etc., as being environmentally friendly. Unfortunately, few of these environmental people or groups use the word green when referring to golf courses.

On the other hand, golfers and others refer to the color of their golf courses as being green. Sometimes they refer to their courses as being lush green, a comment that suggests turf of a very dark green color and density, and one that receives a high degree of pampering.

Actually, the term lush green makes me cringe. It makes me think of turf that receives too much water and fertilizer, primarily for the sake of appearance. It suggests turf that is very pretty to look at

but that is weak, poorly rooted, susceptible to diseases and insects, and likely to keel over at the first sign of hot weather.

It also suggests turf that is of poor playing quality, characterized by lack of firmness and susceptibility to plugging and large divots. This type of turf requires frequent watering and regular applications of fertilizer and pesticides to keep it going. It's bad for the playing of the game of golf, and it's bad for the environment.

Having seen the two perspectives on the word green, can you see how it is advantageous to have a golf course that is both very green (environmentally) and not so very green (lush)?

There are very few people who keep track of what's going on in the world of golf who don't realize the importance of environmental issues as they relate to the future of the game of golf.

Simply put, issues relating to water use, potential pollution from fertilizer and pesticide use, loss of threatened species and natural habitat, and effects of golf course on wildlife all threaten to stall the development of new golf facilities and severely affect the quality of existing facilities.

Many people also realize that the game of golf has responded to these important issues in many different ways. For example, the USGA has spent more than

\$16 million over the past 15 years on research to develop new grasses for golf that use less water and require less pesticide use, and to investigate the effects of golf course activities on the environment.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has instituted a variety of environmental educational programs for its members, and other organizations have responded with educational publications and programs.

Not enough people realize, however, that everyone needs to play a part in resolving golf's environmental issues if the game is to continue to flourish. Golf course superintendents are the most important people in the game of golf when it comes to putting the environmental green into the game, and whereas many superintendents have responded in an admirable fashion, too many others have not.

In my opinion, an ideal program has been established to assist every golf course to do good things for the environment and, in the process, to do good things for the game of golf—the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

Administered by Audubon International and funded by the USGA, the program can help educate superintendents, course officials, and golfers about

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the issues, and at the same time can make the public more aware of the environmentally responsible activities of golf courses.

I'm pleased to say that over 2600 golf courses have signed up for the program.

It's exciting to see how hundreds of these courses have enthusiastically developed and implemented conservation programs, and that many have become certified in one or more of six different categories established by Audubon International.

Yet I'm concerned about the many courses that are not doing their share for golf and the environment. Too many courses maintain the lush green look that compromises turf playability and suggests to those outside the game of golf that golf courses are environmentally irresponsible.

Superintendents must work to take the lush out of the game, and course officials must lend their support by rejecting the heavy-handed use of water,

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fertilizer, and pesticides required to obtain that extra degree of dark green color.

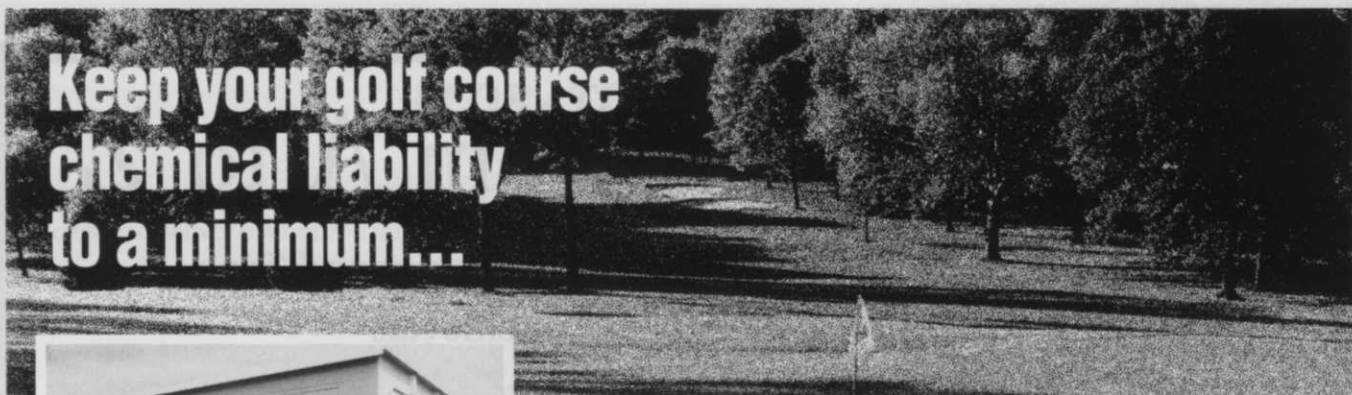
So what can you do? Begin by committing your golf course to an environmentally green maintenance program. Participate in environmental education programs to begin to think with an environmental mindset. Develop a written set of Best Management Practices, and establish an IPM program for your course.

If you have not done so already, join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Pro-

gram for Golf Courses, and follow through with their advice and recommendations. Convince neighboring courses to participate as well. For information about the program, call Audubon International at (518) 767-9051.

Do your part. Let's make sure golf is (environmentally) GREEN.

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