

EPA claims golf courses help and hurt surface water

By Peter Blais

Golf courses can help improve or further deteriorate water supplies, according to an Environmental Protection Agency official.

"No general consensus exists on the impact of golf courses as non-point pollution sources. They can have positive as well as negative effects," said Environmental Protection Specialist Robert Goo, commenting on the recently released *National Water Quality Inventory: 1990 Report to Congress*.

Issued in late March, the docu-

ment states that many U.S. water quality problems have improved because of water pollution control programs. Treatment facilities to cleanse wastewater from point sources such as sewage plants and industrial sites have been particularly effective.

Still, many difficulties remain. The EPA report characterized pollution from agricultural and urban areas as still "serious and widespread." The federal agency also expressed concern about toxic pollutants in surface and ground

water, as well as the loss of wetlands.

Runoff is now the leading cause of pollution, according to state reports. Non-point source pollutants like dirt, oil and hypodermic needles carried along by rain and melting snow off asphalt streets eventually end up in storm drains leading to surface waters.

Those pollutants can also include excess fertilizers and pesticides, added Ben Lesser, a special assistant with the EPA Office of Water.

Farming, grazing, construction,

forestry, stream channelization and mining contribute, according to the report. Improperly maintained golf courses can also be contributors to such non-point source pollution, Goo added.

On the plus side, golf courses act as green space, providing vegetative buffer strips that trap runoff, filter out pollutants and reduce erosion, Goo said.

On the minus side, courses that improperly apply nutrients and pesticides and fail to stabilize the ground during construction simply

add to the pollution problem, he added.

"I haven't seen any solid, negative data about golf courses," Goo said. "Golf industry people say properly managed golf courses are no problem. But opponents say all golf courses don't have the same degree of maintenance you see at the best-run areas."

Lack of education is the problem, agreed Dave Fearis, superintendent at Blue Hills Country Club in Kansas City, Mo.

"It doesn't matter if you're talking about golf or any other business," Fearis said. "You have people who run their business like professionals and those who don't. If one person misapplies chemicals or fertilizers, the public generalizes it to all courses."

"That is probably the most important reason of all to join a group like the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. The education it offers stops things like pollution from happening. Of all the turf associations, the GCSAA probably does more to educate its members than anyone else."

"But the GCSAA has just 11,000 members. That means some courses aren't members and that those educational efforts aren't reaching everyone."

The EPA recognizes golf courses as "potential" problem areas and is developing best management practice guidelines for an upcoming report on non-point source pollution in coastal areas, Goo said. A report on the economic impact of those practices is due out in May or June and the guidelines themselves sometime in 1992, Goo said.

One of those recommendations could involve grass clippings, according to EPA Environmental Protection Specialist Rod Frederick. While clippings can be safely composted or mulched back into the earth away from waterways, they should be removed within 50 feet of flowing water, he recommended. Otherwise they will likely become part of any excess runoff.

The EPA is not singling out golf courses as a problem, Goo said. In fact, he sees more positives than negatives to the industry and its practices, he added.

"Golf courses are trying to address any problems. They know that it's in their best self-interests to do so," he said.

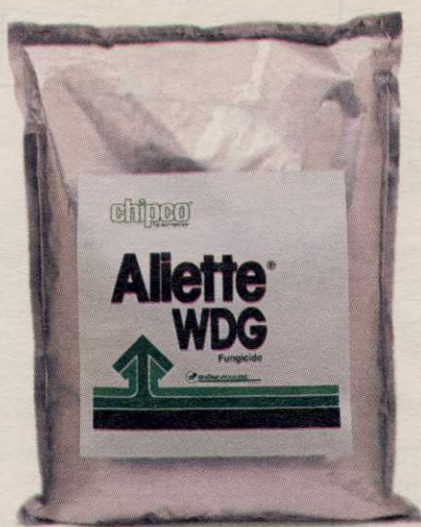
"Water treatment requires a lot of energy and billions of dollars. Pollutants are killing a lot of animals and costing tax dollars," Lesser said.

According to the EPA report, about two-thirds of all surface waters assessed by the states fully meet their water quality standards. The \$58 billion spent by the federal government to upgrade and construct municipal sewage has helped reduce pollutants such as metals, bacteria and oxygen-demanding organic materials.

"Wet weather runoff is the big-

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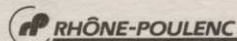
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EPA report

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gest water pollution problem we face, and it is everybody's problem," said LaJuana Wilcher, EPA assistant administrator for water, adding that the overuse of lawn fertilizer and pesticides is part of the problem.

Other points made in the report are:

- The most commonly reported pollutants affecting rivers, lakes and estuaries are nutrients, silt, oxygen-demanding materials, pathogens and metals. Agricultural runoff accounted for more than half the pollution in rivers and lakes, while municipal discharges were the leading cause of estuarine pollution.

- The country has lost more than half its original wetlands and continues losing them at a "significant rate." Approximately 2.6 million acres disappeared from the mid-1970s through mid-1980s. Residential and commercial land development were the leading reasons for the loss. Agriculture and resource extraction were other causes.

- Underground storage tanks, septic tanks, municipal landfills, agricultural activities and abandoned hazardous waste sites were identified as the major threats to ground water. Nitrates, metals, pesticides, petroleum and volatile organic compounds are of concern.

- Nearly 1,000 pollution-caused fish kills, totalling 26 million fish, were reported in 42 states. More than 300 beach closures occurred in 23 states.

Forty-seven states and territories noted 998 fishing advisories and 50 fishing bans. PCBs, pesticides, dioxin, mercury, organics and metals were the most common causes.

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Valley Lodge Golf Club recovering from Christmas flood

By Vern Putney

SIMONTON, Texas—Flood waters up to 10-feet deep all but drowned Valley Lodge Golf Club here Christmas Eve, and another storm a week later made New Year's Eve no time for celebration.

But the Fletcher family has surmounted these setbacks.

Owner-manager Melissa, husband-club professional Browne and father-course superintendent Jack—all buoyed by financial disaster relief from the Small Business Association—are on track in a massive reconstruction effort that may have the new nine-

hole course in playing shape by mid-August.

"Bulldozers are everywhere," noted Jack. "Destroyed greens have been replaced by elevated greens as we seek higher ground. Hole and terrain layout have been altered as we take the high road in the 160 acres available. We're going to end up with a much better course. Up to 30 per cent of the SBA loan will go toward greens and tee box elevation."

The senior Fletcher's tone is far different from the dismal, spirit-dampening days following the devastation, when the Brazos River rose up in raging wrath to deluge eastern Texas courses after heavy rains.

The Fletchers felt particularly buffeted. They had purchased the course a month earlier. Melissa, who had been marketing director and operations manager of The Downs Race Course in Albuquerque, N. M., must have felt race horse connection a far less risky venture after such total destruction.

Now, as the Texas refrain goes, "There seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day."

All signs are positive, she assures. The former 2,400-yard layout will measure nearer 3,000 yards, and she hinted expansion to 18 holes in the near future.

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