

On The Green

The Styrofoam Solution: Ross cures North's spring sprinkler problems

By MARK LESLIE

"We used to rip our hair out," said Kevin Ross about Northern superintendents emerging from winter to find that frost heaves had pushed up many of their sprinkler heads, which had to be dug up and reset. But he has discovered a simple and cheap solution to this age-old problem — a solution colleague Chuck Ravis said should have "ramifications throughout the northern tier of the

country, wherever you get serious frost in the ground."

Styrofoam. After four winters of testing — even shoveling snow off the ground "to drive the frost as deep as it would go" — Ross has found a 2- by 2-foot piece of one-inch Styrofoam is worth more than its weight in gold. It translates to money — and many man-hours — saved.

"After two years, it [Styrofoam] looks very promising," said Ross, superintendent at Falmouth (Maine) Country

Club. "It's a renewable source. It's light, so it's easy to put out and bring in. Storage is easy. After the initial investment, you may have to replace a few pieces each year, but generally we're talking minor costs."

"It worked wonders this year," agreed Ravis, who followed Ross' lead in his own experiments starting in 1992 at Augusta (Maine) Country Club. "I think it will take off [among superintendents]. I'd like to see it used a couple more

years before I endorse it beyond a shadow of a doubt. But it has great possibilities."

"Four or five years ago, when I started this [experiment], every super thought I was nuts," Ross chuckled. "They don't think so any more."

He pointed to the reduction in man-hours for irrigation: 1,700 in 1990 before he started his experiments; 650 in 1993.

He pointed to the \$10 to \$12 an hour he no longer has to pay for labor to reset heads. Ravis estimated it takes two workers, paid \$7 per hour, a half an hour to reset each sprinkler head ("and that's if it goes correctly"), so the Styrofoam saves \$700 to \$1,000 on labor just to fix the heads.

When he fully institutes his program next winter, Ross estimates he will average 500 to 600 labor hours in irrigation. He has eliminated an irrigation position that encompassed 30 weeks a year, 30 hours a week.

The insulation from Styrofoam, according to Ross and Ravis, also protects the heads themselves and the fittings and swing joints underneath them.

Also, Ross said: "I have separate gate valves at each fairway head. I used to have problems with them cracking. At one time it was not uncommon to replace 20 a year — for about \$30 each. This year, I doubt if we do more than five."

"I'm convinced," Ravis added, "that because we kept the heads from heaving and putting stress on the main line and swing joint, we stopped the breakage we usually experience in springtime. It's hard to put a [savings] figure on that, but it's worth a lot to avoid."

Ross used two- to three-inch-thick wafers of two-foot diameter oak to weight down the Styrofoam, while Ravis settled for eight- and 12-inch spikes. Ross also warned superintendents trying this method to treat the turfgrass around the heads for winter-kill diseases before covering it with the Styrofoam.

In the meantime, Ross is also experimenting with Celotex insulation, which has foil backing on both sides. "That worked great," he said. "I think foil backing gives it extra strength."

When Ross started his experiments he used hay bales on 20 heads and insulation on another 20 of his total 380 heads. "That spring we had quite a few problems elsewhere, but all 40 of those heads were perfect," he said.

He added that hay was easy to place in the fall, riding down the fairways and dropping it on the heads. "But it's hard to pick up in the spring. It breaks, or freezes on the ground. And it is not reusable. We sell it for 50 cents a bale for mulch."

Last winter he cut one- and two-inch-thick Styrofoam into sizes of two-by-three, two-by-two, 2-1/2-by-three and 1-1/2-by-three. "No matter what size I used, they worked," he said.

At Augusta Country Club, Ravis last fall covered all 240 sprinkler heads — 30 with Styrofoam and 210 with hay bales.

"I haven't had to touch a single head," he said, "and normally from my shop area alone, I can pick out 10 heads that have moved."

"Even if we had 10 on the entire course, that would be phenomenal."



Highland Bentgrass

The winner on fairways

Highland Colonial Bentgrass is the high performance veteran of golf course fairways, greens and tees.

Experts like Dr. Roy Goss and S.E. Brauen have clearly demonstrated that blending Highland Colonial Bentgrass with modern creeping bentgrass can result in excellent quality when cut at 3/4 inch on fairways. In their research, blends with Highland resulted in turf quality improvements of .56 on a scale of 1 to 10 in comparison to creeping bentgrass seeded alone.

For a free brochure on this fairway trial and information on an inexpensive way to improve your overall turf performance and appearance write to:

Highland Colonial Bentgrass Commission
Post Office Box 3366
Salem, Oregon 97302



CIRCLE #110

Hazardous Material Storage, Meet the Pros.



Professional management practices demand it: hazardous materials, such as pesticides and flammables, must be isolated from the environment.

Today, addressing this issue is as easy as calling on the pros at EPI. Our E.P. Containment Systems answer with the most advanced, relocatable, Factory Mutual approved buildings available. Our complete line of building sizes and designs can be custom-fitted with a wide range of options to perfectly meet your requirements.

At EPI, we've put the best available technology to work for you in cost-effective hazardous material storage. Call today for the complete story on our professional solution — The E.P. Containment System.

Environmental Products, Inc.™

P.O. Box 900 • 169 S. Main St.
Orville, Ohio 44667-0900 • (216) 683-0880



CIRCLE #142

ALLEN HOVER MOWERS CUTTING BANKS & COSTS

OVER 1500 GOLF COURSES IN THE USA NOW USE AN ALLEN HOVER MOWER ...

It's true, since their introduction to the American market well over 1500 Golf Course Superintendents have decided the superior quality performance and strength of build of the Allen Hover Mower is for them. Fitted with safety blades as standard. Available in 18 inch and 21 inch cutting widths with a choice of 98cc Tecumseh or Suzuki 20cc two stroke engines the Allen Hover Mower is a no-nonsense rugged machine, especially suited to the rigorous mowing role demanded by the professional user.

Distributor/Dealer Enquiries Welcome

For further information and pricing contact the leading Turf Equipment dealer in your area or our US representative:



Chuck Sweeney, 469 Severnside Drive,
Severna Park, Maryland 21146
Tel: 410 987 5742 Fax: 410 987 9489



CIRCLE #111