

## Compost proving its worth on fairways

GLENVIEW, Ill. — Less thatch, more earthworms and greener, denser fairways are giving a Chicagoland superintendent a great deal of encouragement in his efforts to use compost and other natural biological agents.

"I can see benefits from just one compost application on the fairways," said Dan Dinelli, superintendent here at North Shore Country Club. Indeed, he's looking at increasing the compost application frequency next year.

Compost also figures into a long-term study — sponsored by GreenCycle, Inc. — of the disease-suppressing effects of compost under real-world golf course conditions. Dr. Michael Cole of the University of Illinois has set up research plots on a fairway at North Shore to see if varying compost application rates offer disease-suppression benefits.

While this scientific study is too new to reach any conclusions, Dinelli is using compost elsewhere because he's seeing significant benefits other than disease suppression.

Simply by changing one piece of equipment and adding one step to normal core-aerating operations, Dinelli said his crews have been able to incorporate compost into the fairway soil and gain the benefits it produces.

"The compost reduced the thatch and increased the earthworm activity, judging from the concentration of castings on the surface," Dinelli explained. "The compost gave us a denser, greener stand of turf."

The veteran superintendent said there may be other benefits to composting, in addition to disease suppression. However, he will continue to use GreenCycle's recycled product regardless.

"It is not possible to fairly evaluate a product you apply just once during the growing season, and we only did one compost application," he said. "I can't think of any product, a fertilizer or pesticide or whatever, that you apply just once. I'd like to do the compost once a month and see what happens over the long term. But given those qualifications, with mild weather and just one application, we spent just 38 percent of our typical fungicide expenditure this year."

To help gauge compost's effects, he had crews leave it off some fairway sections, to allow for comparison. The benefits he has seen have encouraged him to plan for increased compost use on fairways next year.

Scientists are still trying to understand the exact mechanisms of this natural disease sup-

pression. A handful of biological fungicides have been labeled for the turf industry, but the amount still to be learned far exceeds today's current knowledge.

Dinelli, an advocate of the limited use of synthetic turf inputs, has found it's easy to add compost to the soil matrix without creating a surface layer that

might disrupt critical air and water flow through the root zone.

Dinelli uses GreenCycle-provided compost with a Canadian-built spreader that uses two screws in the bed, rather like a manure spreader. The GreenCycle compost is screened to remove contaminants and maintain consistent texture.



This core sample, taken before the area was treated with compost, shows considerable thatch buildup. Samples taken at six-month intervals will show whether treatment with compost reduces the thatch.

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