

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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Stormwater runoff battle rages on in Fla.

By J. BARRY MOTHE

SARASOTA, Fla. — A group of 27 Sarasota golf courses continues to battle the Sarasota County government over stormwater runoff assessment bills that have cost some courses as much as \$46,000 per year and in some cases seriously threatened their survival.

The courses, organized as the Suncoast Golf Course Association, say the rates are far too high and unfair when compared to lower rates assessed to other agricultural-related operations in the counties like farms, nurseries and pastures. The group has filed two lawsuits over the stormwater assessment issue which are still pending. One challenges the level of the assessment rate. The other seeks a re-

bate for what the golf courses contend is excess money they have paid in assessment rates for the past two years.

Stormwater runoff assessments became a hot issue for the Sarasota-area courses starting in 1995 when turf areas became subject to assessments. Prior to that, the courses paid assessments that related only to parking lots and other non-turf areas. The new rates, approved by the county's Board of

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SAFETY BY DESIGN



Safety programs too often overlooked in planning

By MARK LESLIE

NEW YORK — A backhoe cracks into a natural gas line and — boom — the town of North Blenheim virtually blows up. A piece of heavy equipment cuts an underground electrical main, shutting down New Jersey's Newark Airport for a day. In cases around the country, laborers are struck by heavy equipment, caught in trench cave-ins, bedridden by lyme disease contracted from a deer tick on a forested job site.

The "heavy-highway" industry, where these

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Photo by Kevin Frisch

WEISKOPF SURVEYS HIS FIRST TRACK IN MICH.
"You are only limited by your imagination," said PGA Tour great and golf course architect Tom Weiskopf, center, shown looking over the site for his design at Shanty Creek Resort in Bellaire, Mich. Weiskopf is flanked by his shaper Bob McClure, left, and Don Richards of golf course builder H&D, Inc. It is Weiskopf's first design in the Wolverine State. See story, page 26.

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Toro looks toward '99

By M. LEVANS

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. — The Toro Co. and Pinehurst Resort and Country Club, in cooperation with Pinehurst Championship Management, have inked a multi-year agreement that makes Toro the preferred golf course maintenance equipment and irrigation supplier for the Resorts for Pinehurst in North Carolina.

Under the new agreement, Toro will provide

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TPC ON THE RISE



Photo by Stan Badz

The Tournament Players Club (TPC) at Scottsdale (Ariz.) above is among the growing stable of Tournament Players Club courses operated by the PGA Tour. See story on new TPC, pg.23

Cart-path rule gets its day in court

By BOB SPIWAK

An incident at Lassing Pointe Golf Course in northern Kentucky may have far reaching implications for the future of "The Cart-Path Rule" around the country. Involving a handicapped golfer, the situation was resolved in October after a year and a half of controversy.

Don Duckworth of Covington, Ky., had a heart attack in 1993. He was not expected to live. Two years later, he had open-heart surgery twice and survived. His doctor told him

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Greg Jones, founder of the ADMG, takes one out of the sand.

Safety on site

Continued from page 1

accidents mostly occur, is more dangerous than golf course construction. But that can cause golf course builders to be slack in safety precautions, says Corky Buell, operations manager for Landscapes Unlimited and therefore responsible for safety and equipment for the Lawrence, Kan., builder.

"Heavy-highway contractors are generally a lot more safety-program oriented than our industry," said Buell. "If anything, the golf course industry is more lax

than heavy construction. One reason, I think, is probably the remoteness of our job locations. We're not as visible as those working on a city street and don't see a lot of people, and we have less potential for city or state inspectors..."

Nevertheless, with companies wanting to retain good workers and with insurance rates determined by a company's safety record, builders are taking more and more safety precautions than in the past. They are also taking advantage of new safety devices that are coming on the market.

Training alone can prevent many accidents from happening, said Bill Bord,

safety director for the Associated General Contractors of America of New York.

"The Labor Bureau of Statistics showed a decrease in overall accident rate by about 10 percent from 1995 to 1996 across the country," Bord said. "That's because of one of two causes: Lack of work, which I don't believe is true, or more and good training. I'd like to think that's the reason."

Joe Niebur, president of course builder Niebur Golf in Colorado Springs, Colo., agreed.

"We really work on educating our superintendents," Niebur said. "We've greatly reduced accidents, and the main

thing is weeklies [weekly meetings]. We talk about problems from the last week and what we need to worry about the coming week. We have a general meeting every year with supers where safety is a main topic. Also, if something happens, everyone hears about it and everybody learns from mistakes. If you don't talk about it, people get real lax."

According to national figures, most accidents occur in an employee's first 30 days of employment with the company, Buell said. "It's a strange environment, different world, different workers, and the person is unfamiliar with the operators and, sometimes, the equipment..."

"I make the point very important to our people, not only to new hires but supers and foremen, and they stress where the accidents occur, what to do and why."

"There's a big difference in accidents when a crew is trained," Bord said. "I go back 10 years ago. In most of the companies I'm dealing with now, there has been a 60-percent reduction — maybe more — in OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] fines, worker's comp and overall accidents."

"Results are similar in other states."

The major safety concerns in construction are vehicles backing up, excavation and trenching, personal protective equipment, hearing loss, and discovering what is underground before digging, said Bord.

• Backup alarms, according to Bord and Buell, are a double-edged sword. "I won't criticize backup alarms," said Bord, "but when you're on a large project and several pieces of equipment are beeping all the time, you become oblivious to them. Our industry has people hurt and killed quite often by having people run over by big equipment. That comes down to awareness on the laborer's part as well as the operator's. More so the employee because the operator can't always see."

Buell noted that not all equipment is alerted. "It's optional for a skid-loader, for instance," he said, "and for rubber-tired backhoes."

• Trenching without proper protection led to three deaths from cave-ins in New York alone on heavy-highway projects last year, according to Bord. Golf course builders often do not use trench boxes, but that is changing, Buell said.

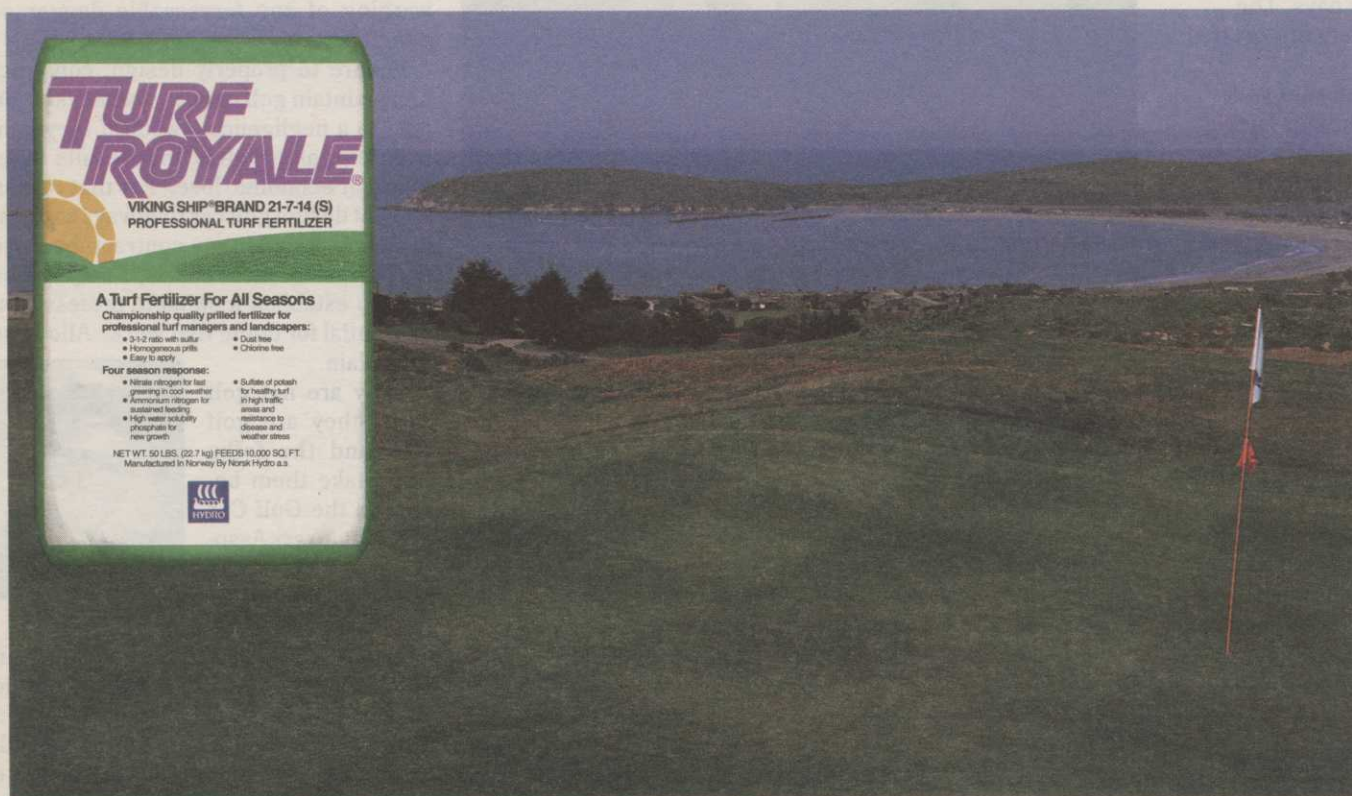
While explaining that the golf industry doesn't use trench boxes as often because it works in more wide-open spaces and can usually cut earth back to a 3-1 slope, Buell added that many higher-end courses today are requiring more drainage, more elaborate shaping and deep bunkers.

If the trench has to go from a deep bunker through a high mound, it can be deep and dangerous, he said. "Your choice is using trench boxes or laying back the slopes... Shoring becomes necessary when a trench curves."

• Personal protective equipment is another concern, Bord said. "Are they wearing their hard hat when they have to, or their safety glasses, gloves and work shoes? We're concerned over worker's compensation as well as OSHA. Ear protection is extremely important because of worker's comp... With proper training, worker's respond very well. Most will wear foam roll-in ear plugs."

"The guys almost without exception are really good about using hearing protection

Continued on next page



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Safety on site

Continued from previous page without even hearing from us," Buell said. "But some of the other safety equipment is harder to use. Hard hats are a tough sell."

• "Call before you dig" has become law in many states. As in the cases of North Blenheim and Newark Airport, mega-accidents could have been avoided with the help of local utilities and municipalities.

"This was a big issue at Glenmoor Country Club," said Skip Lynch of Seed Research of Oregon, who worked with Nicklaus Design when the Canton, Ohio, course was built. "Intercontinental gas mains ran through the site. We had clear designated areas where we could and couldn't go. It was very well laid out before we pushed the first inch of dirt. It could be fatal — and in a very loud way.

"Forewarned is forearmed. But again, you never know what's buried there and isn't marked."

Water and gas lines and fiber optics are all concerns where digging is to take place, said Bord. A related danger is acetylene bottles. "They have to be more than 20 feet apart, or separated by a half-hour firewall," he said. "And you can't store flammables and oxidizers together. Most people don't adhere to that regulation. They also have to be upright and secured. But you find them lying down and up against things. The real hazard is, if one falls over and the neck hits a solid object, it could break the neck off and you have a torpedo on your hands: You could have 2,000 pounds [of pressure] coming out a 1-inch hole."

Buell said his No.-1 rule is that everyone on the job has the authority to shut down an operation if they feel unsafe.

"We make it clear to the guys that safety is everyone's responsibility," Buell said. "On top of that, nobody needs to be uncomfortable in a situation. The worst thing you can do is put a person in a situation that scares them."

Meanwhile, some new equipment is helping make workplaces safer, including:

• Protective vests. To improve reactions to backup alarms, a protective vest has been invented for laborers to wear, Buell said. He explained that the vest contains radar that reacts when a vehicle approaches within 10 feet.

• Falling object protection structures (FOPS). Any machine over a certain horsepower and all crawler-type equipment require a rollover protection structure (ROP). New are the FOPS that can sustain the weight of certain falling objects, in case you are driving under a loader or crane that might drop something.

FOPS are not mandatory at this point.

• "The biggest advancement in trench safety is the improvement in operator's visibility," Buell said. Bulldozers with cabs, for instance, now have rearview mirrors.

• In many places, hard hats and ear plugs are new additions to work sites.

Another sign of the times is random drug testing.

"If a person is involved in sub-

stance abuse, it is a proven fact they are more prone to accidents," said Bord. "An extremely high number of people who had accidents show positive on substance abuse. A lot has to do with location — where you get employees. If you're in a metropolitan area it's a lot more difficult to control substance abuse than in the Adirondacks, for instance."

"We're adamant about our drug policy," said Landscapes'

Buell. "We post signs at our job sites saying we do random drug testing. That often deters local applicants who are on drugs..."

"Our employees have enough to worry about. It's our obligation to control whatever we can. Guys don't want to be working on a site with someone on drugs. They can put your life in jeopardy."

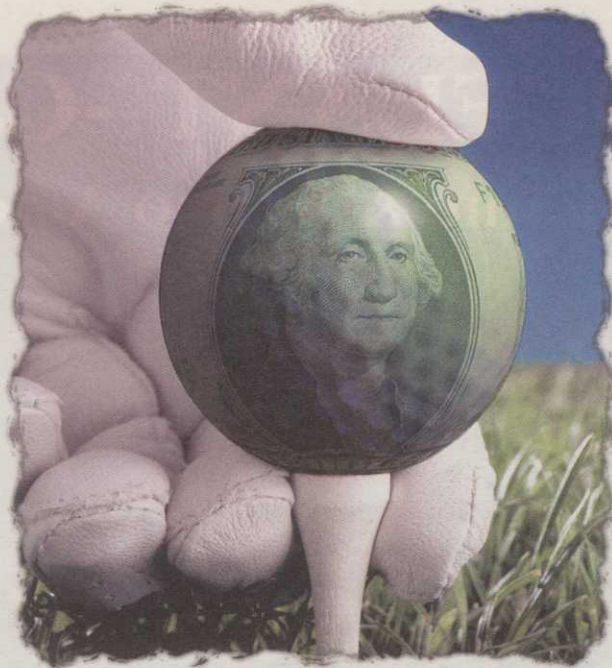
Still, communication to employees about safety can be the single

major deterrent to accidents.

"I send our supervisors quite a bit of information as I see it in publications," Buell said. "The more grotesque thing you can send, the more effective it is."

"John Deere posted signs showing a relatively young man in a wheelchair pushed by his wife and with child at the side. It reads: 'Do you want to be pushed around the rest of your life?' It strikes real close to home."

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