

# Alternative spikes, computerized irrigation cited as greatest advances

LAWRENCE, Kan. — What is the golf course superintendent's equivalent to the recent equipment innovations of liquid metal club heads and titanium shafts?

Alternative spike golf shoes and computerized irrigation were the most frequent responses in a recent survey of superintendents.

Across the nation, 44 percent

of superintendents responding to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's (GCSAA) Golf Leadership Survey said computerized irrigation systems had the single most positive effect on the game in the last five years, in terms of golf course maintenance technology.

An even greater number, 60 percent, targeted the systems as

the management advancement with the most positive impact on operating efficiency. A majority of superintendents (52 percent) believe water consumption will decrease significantly over the next five years, due much in part to this new technology.

On the issue of innovations in golf accessories, superintendents overwhelmingly credited

the advent of alternative spikes for aiding efforts to deliver improved putting conditions. In fact, 89 percent identified alternative spikes as the accessory having the most beneficial effect on golf courses. Research indicates on the whole that alternative spikes do not damage putting surfaces as much as metal spikes, allowing for improved

ball roll. Anecdotal evidence indicates alternative spikes reduce the amount of resources needed for the upkeep of greens.

The survey also highlighted a number of other trends and issues affecting the superintendent within the industry, including the environment, golfer etiquette, and maintenance equipment.

## ENVIRONMENT

In predicting changes in course operations over the next five years, the environment figures most prominently. The three most common predictions were an increase in environmental regulations, improved environmental management techniques, and a decrease in water usage. Uncontrollable and unpredictable weather patterns will always play a role in maintenance expenditures. When queried on the effects of last year's weather phenomena known as El Nino, 44 percent of respondents answered it had increased costs at their courses.

## GOLFER ETIQUETTE

Superintendents identified failure to repair ball marks on the putting green as golfers' worst breach of etiquette (60 percent), followed by failure to rake bunkers (18 percent) and to replace divots (8 percent). Moving violations on golf car paths were also a concern. More than 40 percent said the most common violation was golfers driving on or too close to greens, while ignoring daily posting of golf car restrictions was next (33 percent).

## SLOW PLAY/BALL & CLUB DESIGN

Golfer disdain for slow play is shared by superintendents. The poll reveals slow play is a function of golf's popularity, golfer inexperience, and course conditioning. The respondents cited increased course traffic (33 percent), high rough and fast greens (26 percent) and decline of golfer etiquette (23 percent) as the primary causes of slow play. Superintendents said they have combated slow play by either lowering the rough (46 percent) or widening the fairways (25 percent).

Unlike efforts to control slow play, superintendents are not reacting to the distances achieved by new golf balls or advances in golf club/shaft technologies. Eighty-four percent of superintendents said they were not grooming their courses to compensate for increasing distances of golf balls.

## MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT

Despite the high cost of maintenance equipment, superintendents prefer to buy rather than lease. According to the survey, 68 percent of superintendents buy their maintenance equipment, while 23 percent opt to lease and then purchase it.

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The 18th green complex at Oak Hill Country Club's East Course in Rochester, N.Y., got a Craig Selkner facelift in 1994. It included bunkers renovated into the classic style and with resodded faces and contouring at the rear of the green. See Selkner interview in this month's Development section.

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