

Preparing for the **unexpected**

Simple steps to
creating a plan
that will minimize
downtime in case
of a disaster

By Marisa Palmieri



Despite Eric Bauer's host of experience as a golf course superintendent – including completing grow-ins, serving as a project manager and working on Jack Nicklaus' home practice facilities – he discovered one area where he lacked skills as Hurricane Rita was bearing in on Houston in September 2005.

"I never had a hurricane threat when I was working in North Palm Beach (Fla.)," says the director of grounds at the Club at Carlton Woods in The Woodlands, Texas. "There was always a possibility for a tornado when I worked in Memphis. But you tend to get wiser as you get older, and I didn't think of those things then. Even when I first moved to Houston in 2000, I didn't think of hurricanes."

Though the impact of Hurricane Rita thankfully didn't devastate the Club at Carlton Woods, it did leave Bauer feeling vulnerable.

"Being my first hurricane, you see how little time you have when you're actually in that situation," he says. "It made me realize I wasn't prepared. If it had hit, we were probably 70-percent ready."

Bauer and his crew learned from that experience and developed a plan of attack, including a checklist to begin preparing for future disasters five days before they're expected to hit (see "Disaster preparation checklist" on page 56).

"If you just have to execute a checklist, it makes your job that much less hectic," he says.

Bauer's plan paid off. This year, when Hurricane Ike hit, he and his team were prepared. Despite the 263 trees that were damaged – some of them blown over completely, exposing the root balls – the facility's Fazio course was back in operation within days, and its Nicklaus course was running within two weeks. Many of the area's courses took weeks to reopen.

Thanks to the five-day plan, the facility had tree service within 24 hours, fuel within 72 hours and a generator within 36 hours.

But more than anything else, a quick recovery was possible thanks to Bauer's staff.

"The day after the storm I had four employees show up," he says. "Within 36 hours, we had 85 percent, and we were fully staffed within 72 hours."

Bauer attributes staff preparedness to the plan, which tells employees to contact him within 24 hours during a disaster. After determining no one needs assistance and everyone's families are safe, Bauer shares the game plan for returning to work.

"When they see you're calm and prepared, that's going to make it less stressful for them, and they'll be at work," he says. "Your employees respect the plan. They look at you to be the leader, be prepared and think of these things. They're not paid to worry about these kinds of things; that's what you're there for. If you show them that, they'll respond the way they do every day. If they see you changing your mind and being indecisive, then they're not going to respond well."

WHERE TO START

If a golf course doesn't have some type of general disaster plan, it's behind the times, says Mitchell Fenton, a security consultant and executive security director for Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J.

"Katrina was the biggest lesson for the golf industry," Fenton says. "It woke up a lot of managers and superintendents because of what happens when a natural disaster hits."

Unfortunately, many facilities are vigilant shortly after a disaster, but attention to the issue wanes before long, Fenton says. It's common for managers to create disaster recovery plans and let them fall out of date, collecting dust on a shelf.

"Instead of having a giant book that never gets updated, consider more of a flow chart to provide employees so they can look at what they can actively do," Fenton says, adding that all disaster plans should be updated annually.

"It needs to be reviewed regularly and exercised by all staff," says Ken Koch, owner of the disaster recovery consulting firm Business Resource Management in Eagan, Minn., noting this task can be particularly challenging in the golf industry where temporary and seasonal employees are common. "They need to know where copies of the plan are and what their duties are if a disaster occurs."

All disaster plans should start with a threat assessment.

"Ask, what are the risks to the golf course, and

then you can identify ways to mitigate the risks and have a plan in place," Koch says.

When identifying risks, look beyond the obvious. A club in the Midwest may not seem like a candidate for hurricane damage, but every state in the continental U.S. may be affected by hurricanes. Last fall, Hurricane Ike blew down trees and knocked over a TV tower at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Ky., just days before the club hosted the Ryder Cup.

In addition to hurricanes, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes and nonnatural disasters, such as civil disturbances and gas leaks, there are other circumstances to consider. Whether a facility is a public, private or a resort course may affect the plan's details and who's involved creating it.

While the superintendent will have his own agenda for the maintenance department, it's important he considers how that will work within the scope of the entire operation. Most importantly, senior management has to buy into developing the plan.

At Brasstown Valley Golf Club, a resort course in Georgia's Blue Ridge Mountains, the golf course maintenance staff takes part in the resort's disaster plan. The worst-case scenario involves evacuating guests.

Thankfully, golf course superintendent Steve Gonyea hasn't had to do that yet, but he says he's always in touch with the resort manager about how many guests are in house.

No matter the type of facility, it's important maintenance departments consider how their own disaster recovery plans work within the scope of the entire operations' plan. They should focus on the safety of guests, golfers and staff first and on minimizing down time and damage to the course second.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Because, as Bauer's experience shows, employee preparation is central to recovery efforts, no plan is complete without a current list of staff contact information. Don't forget area codes. Also, provide details for what to do in case phone lines are down. Cell phone numbers, e-mail addresses (cable Internet may still be available during a disaster), home addresses for door-to-door notification or establishing a rally point are all other things to consider.

"This is where the little things count," says Paul Sullivan, vice president and general manager with Agility Recovery Solutions, a disaster recovery planning company. He suggests man-

COURSE MANAGEMENT

agers print all the pertinent details on a card employees can keep in their wallets so they know exactly what's expected of them.

Creating a list of complete contact information for vendors is essential, too.

"Sometimes disasters are frustrating because the facility is fine, but you might not be able to get any supplies," Sullivan says. "In the golf course world, if you can't maintain your grass, you could end up with a bad reputation in the marketplace."

Having a generator supplier on call was essential to the recovery of the Club at Carlton Woods. The irrigation system ran on a generator for two weeks.

To learn more about what every disaster plan should include and get a downloadable version of Bauer's five-day plan, visit golfcourseindustry.com/disasterprep.



Facilities should ensure they're equipped to run a generator; typically, a transfer switch is required, Sullivan says.

In addition to staff and power concerns, Sullivan provides other questions to consider when developing a recovery plan:

- Space – if the maintenance facility were destroyed, what would serve as the central point for staff?
- Off-site or digital backup of critical files – budget, irrigation schedules, etc.
- Technology/connectivity – how many and what type of computers/servers are needed to continue operations?

Because downed tree limbs and those that are vulnerable to falling can be a safety hazard, it's critical to have a tree service on standby, says Chris Hughes, superintendent at Old Corkscrew Golf Club in Estero, Fla.

"Safety is the foremost concern when you're

The maintenance crew at the Club at Carlton Woods wasn't prepared for Hurricane Rita, which didn't devastate the club but left superintendent Eric Bauer feeling vulnerable.



Disaster preparation checklist

Eric Bauer, director of grounds at the Club at Carlton Woods in The Woodlands, Texas, shares the checklist he developed after being unprepared for his first hurricane in Houston in 2005.

"You can retrofit this plan to any kind of catastrophe," he says. "It doesn't have to be a hurricane. It could be flooding or tornadoes – anything that can impact the operation at a golf facility. The more prepared you are going into it, the better and faster you're going to come out of it."

Five days away

- Contact tree companies to be put on their list for clean-up work following the storm.
- Contact a generator rental company for an industrial-sized generator to run the pump house in case of an extended power outage.
- Purchase a battery-powered or manual pump to remove fuel from tanks to fill up equipment.
- Ensure all chain saws are in working order and have plenty of spare chains, bars, bar and chain oil, and mixed gas on hand.
- Ensure onsite generators are operational.
- Ensure all pumps used to move water are operational.
- Ensure operation of a water cart or modified spray rig with a hose to hand-water if the pump station is down.
- Have extra hoses and quick coupler connections for hand-watering.
- Check inventory of safety supplies including work gloves, rain suits, ear plugs, safety glasses and order more if necessary.
- Purchase flashlights and batteries.
- Purchase two-by-fours and landscape timbers to stand up any trees worth saving and plywood to board up exposed windows on the maintenance building.
- Update list of employee phone numbers to contact them after the storm.
- Inventory all chemicals and ensure MSDS sheets are current.

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trying to reestablish your business,” says Mark Twinski, the general manager at Old Corkscrew.

Maintaining a supply of inputs is necessary, too, in case of any supply chain disruptions. For Bauer, wetting agents were key.

“You’re typically not thinking of the grass right away – it’s more about course cleanup – but you want to be confident your grass is going to make it two or three days while you’re not there,” he says. **GCI**

- Schedule a fuel delivery to fill up gas and diesel tanks, preferably after all of the equipment and fuel containers have been topped off.

Three days away

- Remove any course accessories not essential for daily play that have the potential to be flying objects.
- Purchase any fungicides, wetting agents, fertilizers or other chemicals that you may need following the storm that may become temporarily unavailable.
- Top off all vehicles and fuel containers and refill main tanks.
- Save all pertinent files to a disc including a back-up copy of the irrigation database.

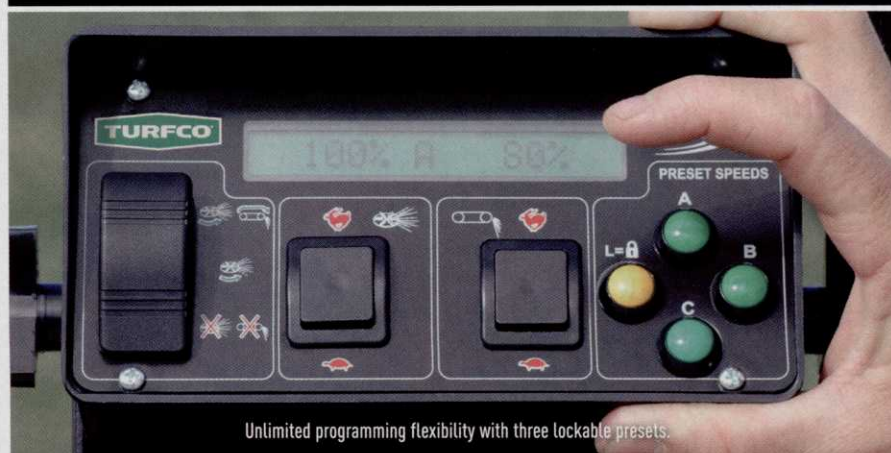
Two days away

- Spray greens with a preventative fungicide application if necessary.
- Remove remaining course accessories that have the potential to be flying objects. This includes, but isn’t limited to, tee markers, tee signs, flagsticks, rakes, ropes and stakes, water coolers, trash receptacles and bag stands on the driving range tee.
- Remove any satellites and/or lower any antennas from the roof of the maintenance building.
- Clean out all drains on the course.
- Board up exposed windows on the maintenance building.
- Store all possible equipment inside. Park all of the rest of the equipment against the building in a protected area away from potential flying debris.

One day away

- Depressurize the irrigation system and shut off power to all satellites and the pump station.
- Open weirs to drop level of lakes if possible.
- Turn off power to all computers. **GCI**

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