

# Dustin's inferno

When it comes to defining the "Summer from Hell," Dustin Riley asks just what is your definition of "hell?"

Many are referring to Summer 2010 as the "Summer from Hell". But how do turf managers define "hell?" Too hot, too cold, too wet, too dry, high disease pressure, reduced fungicide budget etc., etc., etc.

As we reflect back on the Summer of 2010, we may have varying criteria for the "hell" each of us remember. But in the end, we are all referring to the environmental stress that was applied to our golf course turf.

The summer of 2010 was not the typical summer. If you proceeded with the same old programs, you probably encountered some issues. The weather stress was just too great on the turf and adjustments in management needed to be made. Surviving such a difficult summer requires implementing stress relieving practices before the onset of those stresses. I know, easier said than done. The one key change I expanded into my turf management program is practice of rotational venting of the putting surfaces.

Rotational venting? Yes, rotational venting. Many of us were reminded that high nighttime temperatures can be more stressful to the turf than a 90-degree day. The soil relies on the nighttime temperatures to cool down and drawn in fresh air. When soils are wet from repeated rainfalls and continually absorbs solar heat each day, but cannot cool down at night, the turf becomes stressed.

Venting is the practice of poking very small holes on the putting surface.

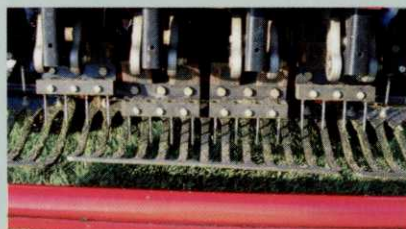
Millions of vent holes allow warm soils to cool and allow fresh air to penetrate the soil. Creating these vent holes will help keep a fresh supply of oxygen to the turf roots. In a sense, the venting process allows the greens and soil to breathe easier. The fresh air promotes healthier and more expansive root systems. The stronger the root system, the stronger the plant and the better it'll handle summer stresses. In addition, the small vent holes will also provide wonderful mini-channels for irrigation and rain water to enter the soil profile during dry conditions.

The venting process can be performed frequently through the summer if a scheduled rotation can be coordinated. For me, I utilize three

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walking greens mowers with separate mowing route assignments. Each week, a different mowing route is targeted for venting. The actual venting process per green requires the same amount of time to complete as mowing (15-20 minutes) By targeting only six to seven greens per event, the venting process can be completed ahead of a greens mower and any early morning golfers. My venting program runs from late-May through mid-August



(core-aeration). As a result, each green is vented on a three-week rotation and four times throughout the summer.

This rotational venting program provided a valuable agronomic benefit to my putting surfaces and helped me survive the stressful Summer of 2010.

# Summer replay

Chris Lecour considers Summer 2010 the "best ever."

While many Superintendents across the country are wishing the summer of 2010 never happened, I look back and wish I could relive much of it all over again. 2010 was the year I stopped being a superintendent. Let me tell you how I spent my summer vacation.

Like many golf clubs in North America, my club was struggling. Designed as a golf and residential community, the golf course was the centerpiece for the entire development. When the recession hit in 2008 everything, everywhere, just seemed to stop. With the arrival this past winter of a new majority partner to rescue the development, who also owns a neighboring golf course just minutes away, my position soon became obsolete. One superintendent would manage both golf courses and by the end of July, I was gone.

The truth is I enjoyed my best summer ever. I spent more time with my kids than I can remember, more time with my wife than she'd care to remember and I loved every minute of it. I slept in late, stayed up late, rode my bike, enjoyed weekends (full weekends mind you, not half a weekend after working a full day on Saturday) at the cottage with friends, and saw New York and Chicago for the first time. Essentially, I did many of the things I wish I had done over the past five years; things I could have easily done in the past five years if I had kept my job and my responsibilities in perspective. Too often I put my job ahead of my family. The last few years saw a shift away from that attitude, but still it became too easy to come up with an excuse to go back to the course in the evening "just in case something went wrong." Let me share some wisdom gained over the past few months: If you're responsible and doing a good job, as most of us are, things just "don't go wrong." When you leave the course for the night, don't come back until morning. It will still be there upon your return.

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I'd be lying if I said I'd been living carefree since my departure. There have been a few anxious moments, usually when I'm reminded of the reality of a shrinking job market in a very slowly recovering economy. Really, I was no better or no worse than any number of good superintendents faced with a similar life crisis; I simply came out on the wrong side of the numbers game. Almost anybody could find themselves on the wrong side over the next 5 years. However, a good friend reminded me, "The cream always rises to the top." I may not come out of this lull with the highest paying job in the area, but I know where the top is now and I intend to be there, enjoying it with the people who are most important to me.

The life of a superintendent moves pretty quick. To go from zero to 60 back to zero again in the middle of the season is not easy. I'm grateful for all the support I received since I left the club and I'm reminded of a chance encounter and conversation I had with a local superintendent at the end of September. When I told him how I had been spending my time he replied, "Man, I really envy you." That comment helped put things in perspective, and I couldn't have agreed with him more.



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Lecour's final post was dated July 30, 2010