



High and **DRY**

Golf course superintendents no doubt will agree that this year has been one to remember so far in terms of its weather conditions. They might even go so far as to file it under “weird” – a very mild winter that almost transitioned directly into summer with no spring.

Some superintendents might dismiss the meteorological abnormalities as freakish and not likely to ever happen again, but the smart ones are no doubt documenting the bizarre temperatures and noting the various tweaks to their maintenance programs that produced the optimal results.

One of the things superintendents had to do this year that went against the norm is turn on their irrigation systems earlier than usual. Now, it could have a huge impact on their budgets, especially if they use city water.

“I had guys who started filling their

“I had guys who started filling their ponds with city water in April who usually wouldn’t do that till August.”

— *Brian Vinchesi*

A crippling drought is helping superintendents discover if their irrigation systems are up to snuff. But it’s also putting pressure on their budgets as they’re starting to feel the effects of having had to turn their systems on earlier this year. *By Jason Stahl*

ponds with city water in April who usually wouldn’t do that till August,” says irrigation consultant Brian Vinchesi. “Even if you’re not paying for your water, your electric bill will go up. Depending where you’re located, it won’t be that bad, but it’s still going to go up.”

Bradley Anderson of Bittersweet Golf Club in Gurnee, Ill., is one superintendent who is feeling the pain of a depleted water supply. His irrigation reservoir, which holds six million gallons and is fed exclusively by run-off, began running out of water in mid-June, and his crews started transferring water from the ponds on the golf course to the reservoir. They shut the irrigation system off during the day, then hook up a pump and reverse the flow of water backwards through the system to the reservoir.

“Eventually, we may need to buy water from the village, but if we can hold out until the rain replenishes our supply, the water

savings will be applied to better use,” says Anderson. “You hate to have to pay for water. I would rather apply that money to topdressing and other projects.” The rain, however, has been hard to come by with, according to Anderson, only two inches in the 60 days prior to June 20.

Another challenge Anderson is facing is that his irrigation system is antiquated. The solenoids and gear drives are failing, and every day, he runs as many heads as he can ahead of play to identify which ones are broken.

“On any given day, we’re fixing 10 to 12 sprinklers,” he says.

Anderson is currently taking quotes from several consultants on a new system but admits that spending \$1 million on such a system right now is not feasible.

“Yes, we’re wasting man hours taking care of things but we’re still spending less money than you would on a new system – and in this

economy, you have to make do with what you have until things improve,” he says.

Vinchesi says that’s one of the blessings of having such a strange season that is warmer and drier than normal: realizing the shortcomings of your irrigation system and being able to make the case for an upgrade.

“The thing about years like this one is that it shows you the deficiencies in your system which, in a normal year, you would never see. You might discover there is more wrong with it than you thought, or that it’s not as good as you thought,” says Vinchesi. “It’s a good year to document what’s wrong with your system and why.”

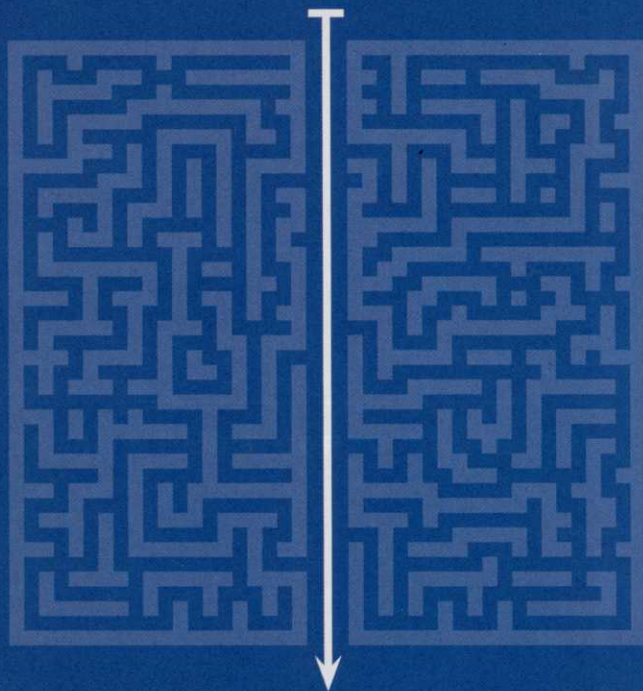
Greg Shaffer of Elcona Country Club in Briston, Ind., has no problems with water supply as he has his own wells. However, he is feeling the pinch from increased electricity costs from running the pumps more. Those costs could be higher, though, if the pumps didn’t have a variable frequency drive (VFD).

“The VFD ensures that they’re only putting out what they need to put out,” says Shaffer.



Water wasn’t the major concern at Elcona Country Club, it was electricity use related to irrigation.

From point A...



...To point B.
Without the BS.

Horizon’s Golf Group can simplify any construction project.

From initial design through all phases of construction, Horizon’s Golf Group can provide technical support and valuable input for:

- Agronomy Issues
- Water Conservation
- Greens Management
- Ongoing Course Maintenance
- Plus, much more!

And now with the new Horizon 24/7, you have the time-saving convenience of online ordering, product pricing and powerful search capabilities.

Login to Horizon 24/7 today at www.horizononline.com and get everything your project needs, from start to finish.



Irrigation • Specialty • Landscape • Equipment
1.800.PVC.TURF • www.horizononline.com

© 2012 Horizon Distributors, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

"They slowly ramp up and slowly wind down so that there's no water hammer, which leads to significant savings in the electrical department."

Even so, more use equals higher bills. Check out these numbers: in May 2011, Shaffer used 1.5 million gallons of water. This May, he used 8.7 million gallons. Through late June 2011, usage was at 5.1 million gallons, compared to 11.2 million this year.

"For the entire year last year, we used 21 million gallons of water, so we're already at half of what we used all last year," says Shaffer.

Fortunately, Shaffer is reaping the benefits of a newer irrigation system installed in 2009 that features a weather station that enables him to monitor evapotranspiration (ET) rates. He will look at the ET rates for a three-day period, and if the ET rate each day was .15, he will irrigate the cumulative total of .45. Sometimes he will stretch it to a four-day period, but if he has two high ET days and the course really needs some water,



Elcona Country Club has been enjoying the benefits of a newer irrigation system.

he will stack two days together and water every other night.

"The theory is that we're putting back out what we used and therefore we're not overwatering," he says.

To minimize wear and tear on the irrigation system, Shaffer divides the course into sections and waters on a deep and infrequent

basis. For example, one night he will water fairways and greens heavily, about a half inch. The next night, he might put the same amount of water on the tees and rough. On the third night, he waters the practice facility and clubhouse.

Vinchesi believes the early start-up of irrigation systems for most supers was a good

ELCONA COUNTRY CLUB

Turf Diagnostics & Design
"managing the elements through science"

Rootzone Diagnostics
 Bunker Sand Testing
 Topdress Sand Evaluations

Laboratory Testing of Greens, Tees, Fairways & Bunkers for Maintenance, Construction, and Renovation

Turf Diagnostics & Design
"managing the elements through science"

We provide accredited laboratory testing for soils, sands, aggregates and amendments.

Contact us for on-time reliable data at a fair price.
 www.turfdiag.com
 Phone: 913-723-3700 Email: turfdiag@turfdiag.com

THE TURFCO CR-10 MAKES IT HAPPEN!

Whether you're topdressing your fairway, renovating bunkers or relocating material, the Turfco® CR-10, with a four cubic-yard hopper, is the workhorse you've been looking for. Its patented three-position switch, cross-conveyor flow control and self-cleaning hopper make it the most effective material handler available. And now the CR-10 is available with WideSpin™ technology—allowing you to deliver light or heavy topdressing applications at unprecedented widths and depths. All this—plus a three-year warranty. The CR-10. Don't start a project without it.

Call 1-800-679-8201 for a FREE on-site demonstration or video.

TURFCO
 THE LEADER, SINCE 1961.

WWW.TURFCO.COM

thing as the longer these systems sit idle, the more problems they tend to have. Still, Shaffer worries that the intense use of his system so far this year might lead to problems.

"You still have pumps turning off and on, pressure fluctuation in the lines, and more water running through the nozzles and rotors," he says. "Since we have a new system, we're not really seeing any side effects to this point, but you still have to account for the wear and tear over a period of time."

While Shaffer normally does his preventive maintenance program in May, he still had not done it by late June because he has been using his irrigation system so much.

Chris Tritabaugh of Northland Country Club in Duluth, Minn., doesn't have to worry about running out of water this year or overtaxing his irrigation system. He has gotten plenty of rain through spring up till mid-June. But, like with a lot of superintendents, the wacko weather has put everything ahead of schedule.

"Everything has been a month ahead al-

Get flexible

So, with many areas of the country experiencing moderate to severe drought conditions, are there any steps superintendents can take to use less water in the future and possibly avoid a budget crunch?

Irrigation consultant Brian Vinchesi believes a more flexible irrigation system might be one answer. He uses the example of a straight double row system of one that is not flexible.

"It's watering the rough and fairway with the same sprinkler, and there's nothing you can do about it. If you don't turn it on, your fairway doesn't get watered," he says. "It's the same thing on the greens. If your greens have only full-circle sprinklers, you're watering the greens and around the greens. Those are all things that could be avoided by having a different irrigation system or even an updated control system."

Bradley Anderson of Bittersweet Golf Club is getting with the program by converting his full-circle sprinklers to part-circle sprinklers so that he's only watering the playing surface.

"We have some areas where we have full-circle sprinklers and we don't need them there," says Anderson. "We're watering a certain amount of rough, not an excessive amount, but we're converting those areas to part-circle sprinklers so we can conserve water. And at \$40 per sprinkler to do that, it's not a big cost. I think we're already following the most conservative practices we can, although we're constantly tweaking them."



Bittersweet Golf Club

Advanced Pigment Technology



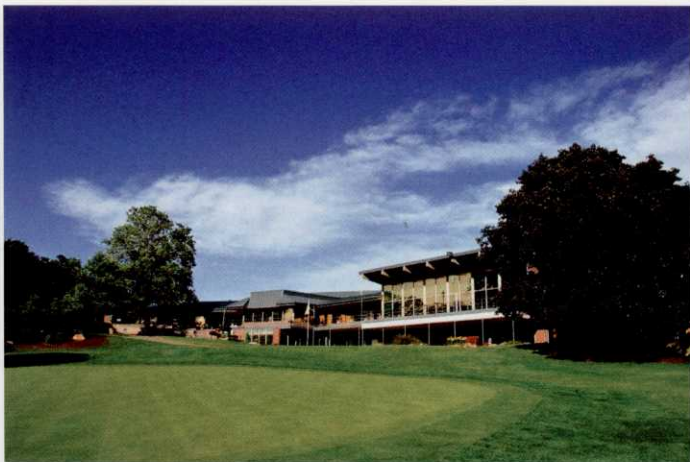
If you want complete solar protection, insist on Turf Screen, the first and only true solar and UV protectant designed especially for turf.

Turf Screen is the only pigment product on the market independently verified to:

- Improve overall turf quality and density
- Reduce summer turf canopy temperatures
- Improve fungicide efficacy
- Utilize the only FDA approved, all-natural ingredients for UV protection
- Reduce harmful UV and Infra-Red Radiation

If you want to color your turf spray an ordinary pigment. If you want to protect your turf and improve overall turf quality, **DEMAND TURF SCREEN.**

www.turfscreen.com Scott@Turfscreen.com 267.246.8654



BITTERSWEET GOLF CLUB

Courses must diversify their water sources.

most to the day," says Tritabaugh. "It has been pretty amazing to watch. We started to see disease in June that we normally don't see till July 4."

Tritabaugh's biggest concern is for his labor budget. This year was the second in the last three years where they had to open early due to the mild weather. He typically plans his budget for opening in the third week of April and brings in some workers the first week of April. But this year, they were a good month ahead of that schedule.

"And being a private course, it doesn't really result in a lot more revenue when you open early," Tritabaugh says. "It's tough when you're on as tight a budget as we are. You almost have to try to make it up at some

point during the season. It's a little bit disheartening when the weather allows you to open early but you end up cutting back to make it work at the end of the year."

When all is said and done, Vinchesi feels the biggest issue relating to irrigation this summer will have been the water supply. He feels that those courses on city water might be better off than those that are not, unless the city enacts a water ban.

"I would be more concerned about the guys who are on a pond or groundwater well where, as it gets drier, it gets lower and stops giving the amount of water it used to or the pond dries up and they have no way to fill it," he says. "On the other hand, the guys who are using city water may not be able to hugely supplement it if it gets too dry and the city cuts them off. So it's important to be cognizant of what's going on with your water." **GCI**

Jason Stahl is a Cleveland-based freelance writer and frequent GCI contributor.

DROUGHT UPDATE

As of mid-June, although most parts of the country were dry, the notable drought was in Florida and Georgia. Most of the country was dry except for Oregon, Washington, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Virginia. The Midwest was abnormally dry. New Mexico was in a pretty severe drought, as were parts of western Texas. The Southeast was dry, and Northern Ohio and Indiana were, too. Massachusetts was in a slight drought, as was Connecticut, although New York was faring pretty well.

Minnesota has been deluged with rain. Just ask Chris Tritabaugh of Northland Country Club in Duluth. In one 10-day stretch in the spring, they received 6.7 inches, and in an eight-day stretch in mid-June received three-plus inches with more forecasted to come.

Underhill®

**ANNUAL 16-PAGE
SPECIAL INSERT**

It's here!



- NEW Products for 2012
- Underhill Bestselling Products
- Handy 16-page Reference

— GOLF MASTER STOCKING DISTRIBUTORS —
NATIONAL CATALOGS

FOREPAR®
A NIVEL COMPANY
fore-par.com

PRECISION
Your Golf Course Supermarket | Since 1979
precisionusa.com

EAGLE ONE
eagleonegolf.com

R&R Products
rrproducts.com

LOCAL DISTRIBUTORS



COLORADO GOLF & TURF

Spartan
Distributors

BISCO



Atlantic Irrigation (CT/DE/NJ/NY/PA/VA) atlanticirrigation.com
Bisco (MA/CT/NH) gobisco.com
Colorado Golf & Turf (CO) 303-917-4141
Jerry Pate (GA/AL/TN/FL) jerrypate.com
Matrix (NY) matrixturf.com
Progressive Grower (MA) myturfsupply.com
Sierra Pacific (No. CA) sierrapacificturf.com
Smith Turf (VA/NC/SC/TN) smithturf.com
Spartan (MI) 1-800-822-2216
Sports Turf (So. CA) sportsturfirrigation.com
Turf Equipment (DE/MD/PA/VA) turf-equipment.com

Products that work...smart.™ • www.underhill.us