

# THE WORST- CASE SCENARIO

## ARE YOU PREPARED?

GCI's Bruce Williams outlines crisis scenarios that'll test the mettle of the steeliest superintendent.

**S**trange and unexpected things happen on golf courses. Some are weather related while others are incidents that test the tenacity of the golf course superintendent and call for quick thinking. Generally speaking, the best way to deal with crisis management is to think ahead and consider what the worst case scenarios are for your golf course.

# TOAST

Imagine going home for the day and driving away from the golf course as the sun sets. The irrigation program is set to start at 9 p.m., giving you plenty of time to run your full cycles before dawn. The next morning you pull into the golf course drive just before sunrise to see a large plume of smoke coming from what was formerly your Turf Care Center. All that is left is a flickering flame and some burning embers. All is lost — equipment, supplies, office records, fertilizers, pesticides... The irrigation central control system is melted. Oh, and it's the middle of the summer and your region is experiencing drought conditions.

The first thing to do is collect your thoughts after a few tears and then take a few deep breaths. This is the time when a good leader needs to concentrate on the task at hand and have logic override emotion. Quick decisions need to be made to get things back on track as best you can.

Two major factors come to mind: prioritize and delegate. Make an overall list of things that need to be done and then prioritize those tasks. No superintendent can do all the work

themselves so it will be necessary to delegate that work to people on your staff, within the club staff and also to outside agencies.

At the top of the list are items that protect your greatest asset: the golf course. After safety checks are done to ensure utility shutoffs then it is time to take care of top priorities. What will it take to allow your golf course to survive and stay open for business while alternative equipment, supplies, etc. can be dealt with? My list would include irrigation and mowing as top items. If you are lucky, then the irrigation system can be operated from the satellites. If not, then outside agencies will need to know there is a "rush order" to replace the central control and any cables or wiring leading to the field or the pump station. A smart superintendent thinks this scenario through ahead of such a crisis and is confident the local distributor has the capability to get them up and running within 24 to 48 hours.

In the event of an emergency, the ability to obtain loaner equipment is paramount. A network of equipment dealers, leasing companies and peers

is a good start. Bare essentials to keep the course mowed should be available in fewer than 24 hours. Hopefully, pictures are taken of the fire scene and a secondary set of records is available for inventory purposes which can be shared with your insurance company. Within a week you should be able to get permission to make purchases or leasing arrangements that will get you up and running with a long-range plan for recovery.

Temporary storage is possible with sea or cargo containers and even temporary rental buildings, if necessary. Be sure equipment that is loaned, rented, leased or purchased is kept secure while you transition to a new building. It is a great idea to keep a list of newly constructed turf care centers in your area and who the architects and builders were. This saves quite a few steps in the first few days. Of course, if you keep that information only on your office computer and without a backup system or cloud, then it will be much more difficult for you to get the ball rolling on a new facility.

I have read many stories about superintendents that have been through the loss of maintenance buildings through fire, hurricane or tornado. Through GCSAA forums and other communication tools like Facebook it is likely that there is no need to reinvent the wheel and many will reach out to help you that have been through this type of crisis before.

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# CRITTER GETTER?



**“A quick tour of the course results in an elephant on the No. 2 green, a tiger on the 5th tee and an alligator sunning by the pond on the 17th hole.”**

Only a few golf course superintendents have the skill set of Crocodile Dundee. Most are not skilled in crisis management when it comes to taking care of critters and the danger they create or the mess they make.

Imagine coming to work to prepare the course for an 8 a.m. shotgun start. There has been a truck accident on a nearby highway. Seems that circus animals were in transport to a local carnival and when the accident occurred a few escaped and found

their way onto the golf course. A quick tour of the course results in an elephant on the 2nd green, a tiger on the 5th tee and an alligator sunning by the pond on the 17th hole. Coincidentally, the local animal officer is on vacation and you have to deal with it.

No book or written plan is available to refer to as nobody could foresee this potential crisis. You call your green chairman and he is supportive and tells you that the elephant can be used to firm up the greens before the event, the tiger should keep the crew

moving quickly and the alligator will keep the crew from hawking balls in the ponds.

God loves a green chairman that is an optimist!

While this is a bizarre set of circumstances to have happen at any one course at the same wild boars, horses and cattle have found their way onto a few golf courses over the years.

Bottom line is to manage the problem at hand and that is the critters themselves. It might take a vet with a tranquilizer gun or some other more drastic

method to subdue the large and dangerous pests. Hopefully there is a humane way of dealing with the dangerous situation. Know the laws in your area to handle animals that are a nuisance. Have phone numbers handy of trappers, hunters, nuisance animal control agencies and such.

Once you have the animals under control then fix the damage and get the course ready for play. A good super will have it all under control by the shotgun and the players will never know what happened.



## Why do natural disasters seem to happen so frequently?

These days, 100-year storms seem to occur about every seven years. So it is more like a 14.5-year storm that can flood your golf course and place future play in jeopardy. Golf courses are often built on low land near rivers or lakes and tend to be in flood plains not suitable for buildings. Many golf courses are designed to be temporary water retention basins in the event of a 100-year flood.

I learned early on that the issue for a superintendent was not to prevent flooding. That was a given with several inches of rainfall. However, getting rid of 30-40 acres of water was the challenge and to do so in a manner that we could avoid long-term turf injury due to the grass being submerged and receiving silt buildup.

If there is any likelihood that you will encounter a flood then a written plan for recovery is highly recommended. It may require sand bagging some buildings and or even green complexes. Make sure sandbags are either filled or can be put in place quickly and with equipment that would be accessible in a flood. Once the water begins to recede then the real work begins.

Some of the water will drain naturally while some of it may sit in pockets. Ultimately a lot of water can be moved through pumping if you have the pumps on site or access to them through local contractors. I was fortunate to have several nearby contractors that would permit us to rent or use their pumps to get the water off and also to keep it moving to prevent wet wilt and scald. We had our own squeegees and also a variety of small trash pumps.

Knowing who to call and having the cell phone number of pump company workers gets you started early and might mean the difference between turfgrass survival and failure.

# DISASTERS NATURALLY!

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"First and foremost every golf course should have written emergency plans in place."



## YELLOW TAPE IS WORSE THAN RED TAPE

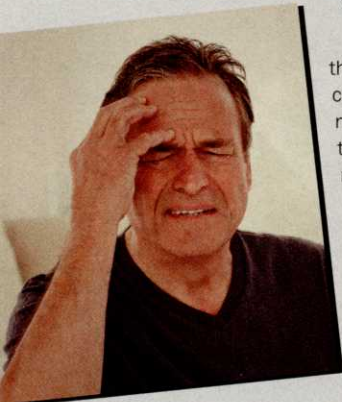
Imagine you arrive at the front gate of your golf course and find some yellow tape across the driveway. Your first thought may be somebody did some parking lot striping or paving that you were unaware of and it is still drying. But after closer inspection the tape has a few acronyms of a regulatory agency and obviously there is something amiss.

News crews from the local TV station arrive on scene and stick a microphone in your face and the cameras start rolling. The questions come at you fast and furious and are far beyond your scope of knowledge. What do you do?

First and foremost every golf course should have written emergency plans in place. Some of those plans should call for a defined set of steps to be taken in case of a spill, explosion or environmental mishap. A part of that plan should have details about emergency communication. It should state who speaks for the facility in the event of such a disaster. If you are not the proper spokesperson and do not have the proper training then it might be best to defer all questions to those who can speak for the facility. Do not feel obligated to speak on behalf of the golf course unless you know what to say and are authorized to do so. There is no reason the golf course superintendent cannot do this, but training is usually necessary.

At this point you don't even know what the problem is until you can gain entry to the golf course. If a spill threatens a waterway, then immediate steps should be taken to contain the spill. Most golf courses should have written emergency plans for such events and appropriate spill management kits. If that is the case, then the crisis can be resolved quickly. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and likely will avoid bringing in local hazard material teams that can be very expensive and also take a lot of time to allow you to open up your golf course.

# DEPUTY, YOU ARE NOW THE SHERIFF



**Y**ou are set to host the local qualifier for a regional golf tournament. You are the assistant superintendent and have been at the course for less than a year. Your boss is a wonderful coach and mentor but you have yet to learn all the nuances of the golf course. The boss comes down with the measles and you are now in charge with three days remaining before the tournament.

Don't panic! This is a wonderful opportunity for you to step up and make the event a huge success. My first suggestion is to not change the plans or programs now that you are in charge for a week. Instead I would suggest utilizing the WWTBD concept — What Would The Boss Do? Carry out normal programs for irrigation, spraying, mowing and bunker maintenance. Don't try to get cute and add

another foot to the stimpmeter readings and dry the greens back. Above all protect the asset and make sure your boss has a living golf course to come back to.

Reach out to neighboring superintendents for advice and counsel. Ask your staff to step up and give you all they can for this event. Together you will succeed and you will be amazed at how well you operate under pressure. Delegate most of the assistant superintendent responsibilities as you will now have your hands full as the interim superintendent.

Give the credit to the superintendent and the crew for the success. Everyone will know it was you at the helm, but being humble is prerequisite for any now golf course superintendent if only for a few days.

We had a little bit of fun and also worked through some serious scenarios for crises at a golf course.

Be prepared and plan ahead for things that could happen at your facility. It is so much easier to remedy a problem with a well thought out set of solutions... before the crisis hits. GCI

*Bruce Williams serves as principal for both Bruce Williams Golf Consulting and Executive Golf Search. He is a frequent GCI contributor.*

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## HAVE THE ANSWERS

Heaven forbid any of us face a crisis but surely we will all have problems at a bit lesser level. Be ready, be steady, and have a plan. While we did not mention much about communication while in crisis remember that you should have the answers to these 5 questions that will surely come up when problems occur.

- What happened?
- What are you going to do about it?
- When will it be right?
- When can we play?
- How much is it going to cost?