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ARE YOU AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GOLF COURSE?

I'm sorry to note that 2012 was a particularly tough one in the golf-maintenance and design industry with the deaths of four friends and fellow professionals: John Harbottle, Greg Breningmeyer, Bob Pinson, and Stan Zontek.

Besides feeling bad about each individual passing, their too-early deaths got me wondering if there's something unhealthy about what we do. I came to realization that we aren't paying enough attention to serious industry-related health issues.

We all agree we've figured out skin cancer. I can't believe there are many superintendents who don't cover themselves with sunscreen and see a dermatologist at least twice a year in search of spots and lesions.

While we're good on skin, we're pretty bad on just about everything else. And if we don't get a grip on these problems, we're going to be burying more of our own too soon.

I'm looking forward to the national meeting in San Diego in a few months, as well as the many regional and local sessions I attend, as a way to meet old friends and make new ones. But it worries me greatly when the first part I see of a colleague is what's hanging over his belt. Not the "Freshman 15" we used to joke about back in college but the "Industry 25" – or more – that seem to be affecting more and more of our peers, young and old.

Extra weight, sometimes verging on obesity, is one problem I see. But it's symptomatic of the issues affecting us all, and especially those who've made it to the top of the profession and a certain age. We may be doing well in many aspects of our jobs, but our bodies could be ticking time bombs.

Think back to when those of us 50 years plus started in the business. We didn't have the equipment, technology, and other advantages enjoyed

by our younger counterparts. When I started working on a maintenance crew, I walk mowed greens, tees, and mowed around the clubhouse grounds. After that I either manually sprayed or hand-irrigated, walking from green to green with my syringe loop. I hand raked bunkers.

But moving up the ladder also meant moving less. Going into management meant going indoors, being physically less active while supervising and training others to do the tasks I used to do. Reaching the top rung is great, but it involves being chained to

a desk or the seat of a golf cart.

I've also noticed that while we've changed our work habits, many of us haven't changed our eating habits. A cheeseburger, fries and Coke aren't so bad if you're outdoors and moving around all day. But if you're at a desk think about having a salad instead.

At least as dangerous as extra weight is extra stress. With age come responsibilities both inside and outside the job, particularly to one's family. We're all worried about keeping our jobs, satisfying committee people and owners, keeping current on advances in agronomy, going to conferences, long hours, late nights, and competition from young bucks. Then there's the general malaise throughout the golf industry the last few years. It's enough to make you sick. And it can.

On the upside, I don't see as many superintendents smoking today as I used to, but in certain parts of the country guys chew tobacco. Hey, I'm no saint and I'm the last one to tell you or anyone what to do. But I hope you'll take a good look at your habits, your waistline, and your blood pressure. Then look at the picture of your wife and kids sitting on the desk and ask if you're being fair to them as well as yourself.

As I said before, the industry has done a good job educating us about skin care. Now it's time we look inside our bodies. And I'm not just talking to my fellow 50-year-olds. You might think you're being active because you occasionally help the crew roll out some sod or dig a trench. But if it's not consistent exercise it's not doing much good. And it's certainly not enough to be rewarded with a fat, greasy burger in the clubhouse at lunch.

Attitudes are starting to change. I know quite a few superintendents

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Rise in risk

The CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) recently released 2009 data on U.S. adult health risks and behaviors. Among U.S. males, health behaviors for tobacco use and binge drinking decreased and chronic conditions including obesity, diabetes and hypertension prevalence increased from 1999 to 2009. Here are other key findings:

- Men who reported themselves as obese – a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30.0 to 99.8 – bincreased from 19.9% in 1999 to 28.5% in 2009
- Men who had their cholesterol checked and were told that it was high increased from 29.6% in 1999 to 39.6% in 2009
- Men who reported having diabetes increased from 5.9% in 1999 to 8.8% in 2009
- Men who reported having hypertension increased from 23.0% in 1999 to 29.8% in 2009

Source: cdc.gov

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who ride their bikes to and from work. Some jog their courses early in the morning, which has the added benefit of giving them a hole-by-hole view of what's going on out there. It's a good start.

And that's another reason I'm looking forward to the national meeting in San Diego—running. I'm sure I'll see, and maybe join up with, groups of joggers taking advantage of that city's great climate and miles of running paths. I encourage the powers that be in our business to start moving, too, coming up with initiatives and other ways to get all of us, regardless of age, better educated and more dedicated to taking care of ourselves.

We lost too many good friends and fellows in 2012. Let's see if we can keep not only our golf courses but ourselves healthy in the future. **GCI**