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## DON'T MISS AN OPPORTUNITY

The majority of the U.S., according to some experts, is an unprecedented drought. The U.S. Drought Monitor indicates that most of the country is experiencing either abnormally dry conditions or moderate, severe, extreme or exceptional drought. The Drought Monitor is updated weekly on Tuesdays ([drought-monitor.unl.edu/](http://drought-monitor.unl.edu/)). The monitor also shows history, allowing you to see how the drought has expanded and worsened over the last 6 to 12 weeks.

On top of the “non” winter, many superintendents had to start their systems early and dip into back-up water supplies before the onset of a hot and dry summer. However difficult this year has been, there may be a silver lining and an opportunity that shouldn't be missed.

Droughts reveal irrigation deficiencies. Superintendents who believe they have adequate irrigation systems find out they don't and irrigation systems that aren't very good to start with end up being very difficult to deal with. In a drought, an irrigation system requires more maintenance – in both labor and material – more attention, and more management.

If your water supply is limited, then you have probably lost sleep this summer. If you pay for your water, then you've had to review and rearrange your budget on a weekly basis. And if you are on a potable water supply, then you may be subject to water restrictions.

The good news is that all droughts end at some point, but unfortunately usually in dramatic fashion which could cause you even worse problems.

For example, the 10-year Australian drought ended in 2011 with major flooding causing wide-spread havoc and death. So, take advantage of the drought. Think of it as a learning experience about your irrigation system.

People have short memories, especially members. In two years – when your golf course is completely green – no one will remember how dry it was and the turf's condition or appearance during the drought. Therefore,

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document the problems that drought caused and how poorly your irrigation systems performed. If you document the problems, then when the time comes for you to pitch any type of irrigation system improvement you'll have the documentation to jar your board's and members' memories.

Documentation needs to be detailed and factual. Nothing beats pictures – low pond, exposed intake piping, dry spots around the course. If it's really bad, get in the air and take some aerial photos.

You also need to collect data. How much water are you using compared to past years? How much more are your water costs than in past years? How much longer are you irrigating than in past years? Is your pump station operating longer? Look at your

electric bill as compared to previous years. Are you buying more irrigation material? Document how much labor is being consumed by irrigation repairs. Has your hand watering increased from watering hot spots, because you need to be more judicious with your water use, or is it the only way you can keep critical areas alive?

In a drought water quality becomes an issue. Hopefully you have a baseline water test from a normal year.

As water flows through streams and rivers, and ponds draw down, water quality can deteriorate. Concentrations of various contaminants increase as there is less dilution. Test your water and see if it is changing. If it is, then how is that affecting your turf quality? Document it!

If you already had irrigation issues, then this summer's drought just compounds them. However, it does allow members to see the issues you have. It is hard to showcase irrigation problems when it is raining on a regular basis. Use this opportunity to your advantage. Point out the deficiencies in the irrigation system that the drought clearly illustrates. You may not get to use the information immediately, but you will have it when you need it. **GCI**



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