



2013 IRRIGATION OUTLOOK

As we start the new year it's time to look at what the potential for golf course irrigation systems will be in 2013. Will the market be flat, grow or contract? Will there be new products? As an owner, superintendent or manager is there anything happening that may alter your 2013 plans?

Water will continue to be a hot topic in 2013 as it will be till we all turn to dust. Various state and local regulations, new standards and codes and costs will affect how a golf course uses, manages and pays for water. Alternative water sources for irrigation will continue to be explored, mandated and used. Golf courses will need to continue to efficiently manage their water sources and budgets. Investing in new irrigation technology when budgets allow will reap benefits.

The golf irrigation market in 2013 will contract a bit when, but 2014 is already looking to be a good year. In the U.S. almost all of the new irrigation systems in 2013 will be on existing courses as new construction is still basically non-existent. Overseas new construction will provide some relief to manufacturers. As the golf economy continues to sputter many courses that need new irrigation systems but can't afford one will be doing improvements to their system piecemeal as budgets allow. As was the case in 2012, there will be considerable irrigation control and pump system upgrades.

Control system upgrades can consist of a number of alternatives. You'll want to upgrade the control system software to a newer version or one that provides you with more control. As part of the central upgrade you may or may not upgrade the field controllers depending on the requirements of the central control upgrade you are



Given the anticipated 2013 economy, planning for **new irrigation systems** and upgrades takes more time, more documentation and more planning.

purchasing or the desire to achieve independent sprinkler control. Along with the control upgrade, you may have to upgrade your grounding system to protect your investment. Power supplies and communication wiring will need to be checked, as well.

You can just simply upgrade your remote system. Radios are becoming outdated, being replaced with tablets and smart phones to precisely operate your system even when your out on the course or out of the country. These smart devices do more and provide more feedback than the conventional radio remotes and with a lot less key strokes. These smart devices allow you to perform almost all of the functions you can perform at the central. As such, many superintendents hardly use the central anymore for routine tasks and instead use the smart device.

Pump system upgrades can consist of new pump and motors, control

panel upgrades or just preventive maintenance. Control panel upgrades, while expensive, can give new life to an aging pump station. Adding variable frequency drive and better switching from pump to pump will extend the life of the existing pumps and motors as well as your pipe and fittings. Without a properly operating pump system the rest of the irrigation system is difficult to operate. So if you're light on funds the pump station should be the priority.

If it's been more than 10 years, the pumps should be broken down and parts checked for wear and the motors rewound. This is especially important with turbine pumps.

In 2013, Hunter Industries is going to reenter the U.S. golf irrigation market with a number of new products and revamped distribution. Hunter has been strong in overseas golf markets but weak in the U.S.

Rain Bird and Toro will have upgrades and updates to their existing products line, mostly along the lines of software.

You will continue to see all three companies provide increased sensor capabilities and integration. Likewise, expect to see more sophisticated communication protocols to interact with smart devices and other systems on the golf course, such as pump stations.

This year is not expected to be a great irrigation year. However, it will still be full of limited upgrades for those golf course facilities that have been saving and planning to take advantage of lower pricing.

As fewer systems are being bid in the market, both material pricing and labor pricing have a tendency to be driven lower by the amount of competition. So if you are in a position to make substantial improvements to your irrigation, make sure you shop around and get the best deal. **GC**