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NEED AN IRRIGATION TECH?

They're a great asset to not only the golf course, but also to the irrigation system.

When it comes to irrigation maintenance and repair the responsibility at most golf courses usually falls to the assistant superintendent or second assistant. Why? Because repairs and troubleshooting need to be done by someone who is responsible and has the ability and understanding of how important the irrigation system is to the overall maintenance and operation of the course.

If water management is a factor, due to limited water supply or public perception, there is even more reason to have a management-level employee dealing with the irrigation system. Have you ever thought of designating someone to perform all your irrigation maintenance or hiring an irrigation technician instead of letting it fall to the assistants?

An irrigation technician is a great asset to not only the golf course, but also to the irrigation system. Having a staffer who is solely responsible for maintaining the irrigation system helps the system operate better, have fewer problems and most likely save water. Irrigation technicians are proactive with maintenance as opposed to being reactive, which is the case at most courses.

Most high-end courses have irrigation technicians, with some facilities employing more than one. Whether there is an irrigation technician (or technicians) is usually dependent on how large the irrigation system is or



how much trouble it is causing. Most high-end courses have irrigation technicians, with some facilities employing more than one. Irrigation technicians are proactive with maintenance as opposed to being reactive, which is the case at most courses.

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Intuitively, the more sprinklers the system has the more maintenance it requires. Likewise, an older irrigation system needs more maintenance. Consider designating an irrigation technician if system maintenance is taking too much of your or your assistant's time, or if it is taking more than 75 percent of one of your staff's time.

There's no hard and fast rule. I know many 18-hole courses without an irrigation technician, and at least one course with three. One irrigation technician can maintain approximately 2,000 or so sprinklers with their associated controllers, valves,

wiring and piping, but this will vary by course and number of holes.

What duties will an irrigation technician perform? First and foremost, addressing issues as they occur. These will include: broken pipes, leaking fittings, weeping sprinklers, non-operating sprinklers and controller or wiring issues. Routine work includes troubleshooting the system as necessary, as well.

When immediate issues do not have to be addressed, the technician can level sprinklers and set them to grade, check sprinkler arcs and nozzles and perform audits to (VINCHESI continues on page 62)



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that then influences some growth metric.

But I am not convinced that colorants grow roots. There is more work to be done to better understand how the use of pigment colorants applied to a plant leaf surface influence all the ways a plant could respond.

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED THEY WILL CONTINUE TO USE COLORANTS AS A TURF MANAGEMENT TOOL. WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE IN THE COMING YEARS?

We see today that colorants do have a place in the bigger picture of turfgrass management practices by golf course superintendents. Their current uses have expanded considerably in these recent years, largely driven by economic forces. Where there was once much skepticism and avoidance, there is now general acceptance of these pigment colorants as a result of early-adopters looking for new ways to not only solve turfgrass management problems, but to maintain and even enhance the game experience by their golfing clientele. I would say the place of colorants and how they may be used in more innovative ways will depend on where they fit as a component that superintendents use to create the kind of golf experience that draws greater participation and enjoyment of the game by future generations. **GCI**

(KAMINSKI continued from page 48)

down the street didn't lose turf and you did. They need to realize that there's a real difference between the creeping bentgrass greens on the neighboring course and the annual bluegrass on yours. They need to realize that the hybrid Bermudagrass they thought was a bulletproof choice on their greens may be challenged in a winter like this.

They need to know that it's not your fault that one of the greens on your course died while another didn't. They need to understand that variation in drainage or shade on golf course surfaces as well as microclimates from one green to the next can have a tremendous impact on plant health and survival.

They need to understand that preventive maintenance practices help to reduce

improve irrigation scheduling. They can perform preventive maintenance, such as cleaning out controllers, exercising gate valves, tightening grounding clamps, replacing and leveling valve boxes, and cleaning and painting the pump house and pump station.

Above all else, patience is necessary to provide these services. Troubleshooting a strict sequence and customer service as the irrigation technician is always out among the members and players making repairs.

Of course, being mechanical oriented and not being afraid to get dirty doesn't hurt, either. Wire tracking and fault finding is a necessary skill, but unfortunately it is one only perfected with experience. With new technologies – such as integrated decoder type systems and the use of HDPE pipe – more skills and training are needed because these systems use more sophisticated equipment.

Most superintendents determine the watering schedule and have the irrigation central control system in their office. However, in some cases, the irrigation technician may be watering or implementing the schedule. Usually the technician maintains the irrigation system central controller database. As we have discussed in this space before, it is es-

sential to have an accurate database. The irrigation technician is best positioned to ensure that the correct sprinkler, nozzle and arc that they have serviced in the field are reflected in the database. By performing audits, they can also use the data collected to fine tune precipitation rates and runtimes.

Unfortunately, good irrigation technicians are hard to find and they are beginning to earn higher salaries. There is no real training program other than experience. Much like a spray technician, if you can identify someone on your staff with the right skillset you can train them on irrigation repair and send them to electrical troubleshooting or auditing classes.

Irrigation technicians can be well worth the cost especially if you have an aging irrigation system that has continual problems as they are less expensive than a new system.

If you have the budget to hire or the available staff, an irrigation technician will improve the operation and lengthen the life of your irrigation system. It should also provide for better playing conditions as the irrigation system will cause less issues on the course and have improved uniformity when compared to an irrigation system only maintained and/or repaired when necessary. **GCI**

the possibility of these dramatic events, but that even the best laid plans are sometimes not enough.

Hopefully one thing that will come out of a winter like this one is that clubs will start to realize the potential negative impacts of a harsh winter (similar to harsh summer) and allow for modifications. These may include converting from annual bluegrass to creeping bentgrass or installing internal drainage to improve water movement. Each case is different and the only person who knows what best for the course is the individual superintendent managing the course.

The bottom line is that the members and golfers out there need to realize a few things.

- The death experienced this winter was unavoidable
- Recovery is going to cost money and take time
- Reconditioned greens will struggle this year, especially in the summer
- The superintendent's recommendations to improve the overall growing conditions of the turf (e.g., internal drainage, tree removal, etc.) should be taken into serious consideration

Although the golfers will likely feel angry and upset about the conditions and/or delays in course opening, I can assure you that the superintendent and their staff will be feeling 10 times the pressure and stress. Believe me, they hate losing turf more than you. **GCI**