

Work to eliminate localized dry spot

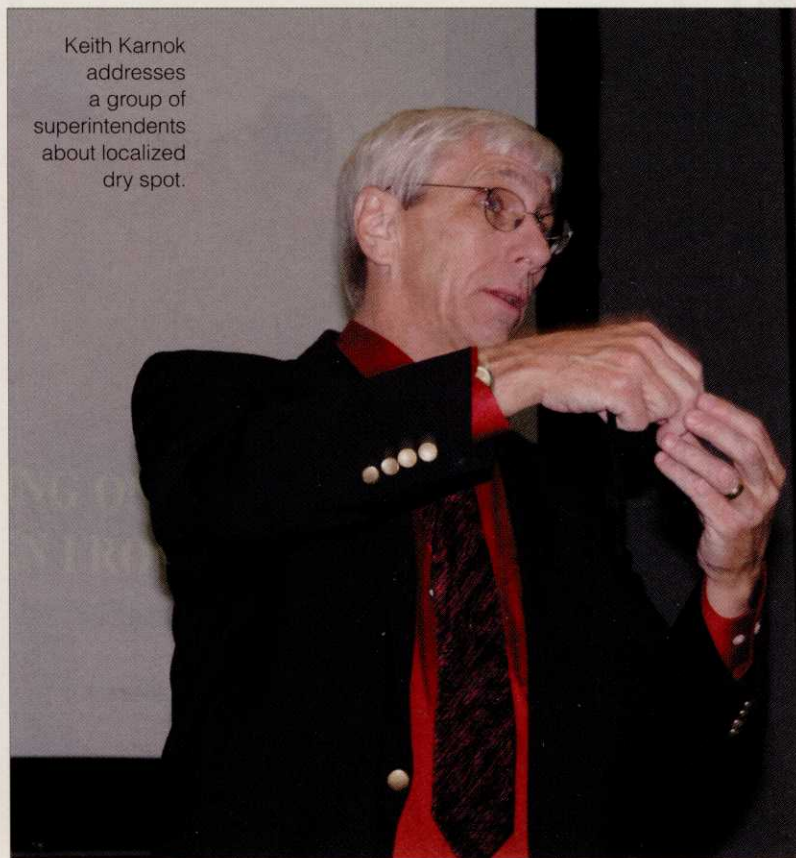
It's one of those afflictions nobody sees coming. Anywhere from eight to 18 months after green construction, when everything seems to be going well, it appears – usually in sand-based greens – with little or no warning. The affliction is localized dry spot, and it starts, like many turf afflictions, beneath the surface.

It's a greater problem now than it was even 20 years ago, says Keith J. Karnok, Ph.D., from the department of crop and soil sciences at the University of Georgia, citing the abundance of wetting agents available on the market. Kar-

nok presented a half-day session about localized dry spot at the recent Golf Industry Show in Anaheim, Calif. An increase in sand-based greens and a decrease in the height of cut on greens partly are to blame for the recent upward trend.

While prevention practices are the best way to avoid the problem, the patches of dry turf that alert superintendents to the problem are sometimes the first sign something's wrong. Knowing more about how it forms can help eliminate it.

Keith Karnok addresses a group of superintendents about localized dry spot.



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Hydrophobic or water-repellent soil causes dry spots. Signs the soil is water repellent include footprinting, blue/green coloration, wilting and ultimately the plant's death. And this isn't unique to golf courses.

"People have been battling this since there have been soils," Karnok says.

To better understand whether a patch of problem turf is a result of hydrophobic soil, take a core sample and test it. Before starting the test, make sure the soil is dry. A hair dryer or fan can be

used to dry the soil gently, but don't put it in a microwave or oven, Karnok warns. Place droplets of water on the sample every half-inch or so. If the droplets sit on the sample's surface, the soil is hydrophobic.

Localized dry spot is caused by a coating of particles that repel the water.

"That coating is the end result of organic matter decomposition," Karnok says. "These organic compounds, when allowed to dry, become very water repellent."

There are different levels of water repellency, and the levels can vary throughout a green. Soil is usually more severely hydrophobic in the summer, and it tends to appear in the top two inches of the soil profile because more organic matter resides there than further down.

Sand is usually the common denominator when water repellency is reported. In fact, coarse-textured soils are more prone to becoming hydrophobic.

"If you've got a sand-based green without fine soils mixed in

and it's a couple years old, you've got hydrophobic soil to some extent," Karnok says.

Clay-rich soil usually is able to protect turf against dry spot.

"Clay's ability to hold a lot of water overshadows the problem," Karnok says.

For those who have dry spots and no sand in the profile, Karnok recommends testing to see what else could be causing the problem. It's sometimes, but rarely, found in fine-textured soils.

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only compound the problem. Factors that contribute to localized dry spot include lower cutting heights; prolific organic matter-producing cultivars; decreased cultivation and topdressing practices; and increased golfer expectations for lush, green conditions. Some try to prevent water-repellent soil by monitoring the soil's critical moisture point – at which soil won't wet.

"In most cases, you won't get to that because it'll be dead," Karnok says.

The hydrophobic coating can't be prevented easily, but there are ways to make it less likely to occur. The best method in avoiding LDS is prevention, Karnok says.

"Strive for a deep root system – beyond the top two inches of the profile," he says. This can be achieved through practices that promote healthy turf."

Once the water-repellent coating sets in, there are ways to manage the soil to hydrate it. Some tests show sodium hydroxide, or Drano, can remove the coating.

"The problem was a little bit of uncertainty

about what's going to happen to the turfgrass," Karnok says.

A popular method of temporarily alleviating the symptoms of water repellent soil is through the use of wetting agents. They work by attaching to the organic coating that causes the repellency and allowing water to be absorbed.

While different wetting agents work on different levels, Karnok hasn't found any agents that did nothing.

"All the common available wetting agents decreased water repellency to some degree," he says.

Karnok doesn't recommend any certain brand because the most ideal wetting agent is defined by the needs of the end user.

There are few advantages of using wetting agents on nonwater-repellent soil, but Karnok says it's a good idea to apply an agent to the entire green because it's likely all soil on the green is hydrophobic to some extent. It just might not be displaying the symptoms as prominently as the dry spots. – HW

PREVENT HYDROPHOBIC SOIL

The best way to prevent localized dry spot is with a turf management program that promotes healthy turf, says Keith J. Karnok, Ph.D., of the department of crop and soil sciences at the University of Georgia.

Healthy practices include:

- Selecting the best turf species/cultivar for the region
- Reducing the amount of nitrogen applied
- Increasing cutting height
- Irrigating properly/evenly – usually LDS appears in areas that haven't gotten enough water
- Following a strict cultivation and topdressing routine to combat accumulation of organic matter
- Not adding to the problem – test the topdressing sand or mix for water repellency before using it



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Golf course architects see more renovations, fewer new projects

As the U.S. experiences a shift in market conditions and demographics, golf course architects have been acclimating to market changes that include more golf course renovation projects and fewer new construction jobs.

This was discussed as the ASGCA hosted a panel at the recent Golf Industry Show in Anaheim, Calif., to share observations of current market trends. The panel included ASGCA associate Gil Hanse, past ASGCA president Damian Pascuzzo and members

Steve Smyers and Doug Carrick.

There was discussion about the latest numbers from NGF, which state there was a net loss of 26 golf courses in the United States in 2006. However, there has been an increase in new golf courses elsewhere, including Europe, the Middle East and South Africa, panelists say.

One of the reasons why golf course closings outpaced openings is the value of the land on which courses lie. During the past seven years, 24 facilities in Myrtle Beach, S.C., closed or



ASGCA members discuss various trends in golf course development.



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have been slated to close, says Greg Muirhead, president of the ASGCA and panel moderator. Land's increasing value has caused several golf course owners to sell their property, he says.

Instead of new course openings, investments are being made to renovate existing courses at private club facilities, says Smyers, who's working on four such projects.

Regarding the trend of new courses increasing yardage, Hanse doesn't try to maximize yardage on renovation projects but rather honors the work of the original architect.

"If we go in and screw around with their design, they're gone forever," he says.

Another design trend has been the tendency toward faster putting surfaces, but Smyers sees that subsiding.

"Golfers will accept more undulating putting surfaces than even a few years ago," he says.

Pascuzzo suggests attendees encourage a reasonable green speed when planning a new course, saying the bulk of the membership likely favors a slower, more forgiving green.

"Talk about it upfront," he says. "Who's your market? You're not going to get a tour here. You'll mostly want them at nine or 9.5, not 10 or 10.5. I want to challenge the player around the green. If you take that tool out of my toolbox, it's going to dumb down the golf course."

People often want architects to make courses easier to play.

"How much easier can we make it?" Smyers asks. "It's not about making courses easier; it's making them more fun and playable."

When there's new course construction in the U.S., it usually is connected with real estate.

"We haven't had a stand-alone project in seven to eight years," Pascuzzo says.

Another factor that's driving the market and acting as an aid to real estate-linked golf courses is the retirement of baby boomers. There seems to be a trend among this demographic of owning multiple homes, with at least one located on or near a golf course.

"They're looking for the resort lifestyle 24-7," Pascuzzo says.

There also are ways to draw younger people to the game with programs such as The First Tee and Play Golf America. Snowboarding, for example, revolutionized winter sports by bringing attention back to the genre when skiing and other snow sports seemed to be losing popularity, Pascuzzo says.

"Golf needs something like that," he says. "Golf has to compete with a lot more now than it did 20 to 25 years ago, including the Internet, games and other distractions."

Between a wider range of entertainment options, cost and player expectations driving potential golfers away, panelists agree the industry needs to grow the game.

"We can continue to throw ideas out, but we need to work in concert," Pascuzzo says. — HW



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Architects say one design trend is toward faster putting surfaces.

Accommodating disabled golfers opens door for revenue hike

A majority of the golf courses in the U.S. are required by law to be accessible to disabled golfers. Some courses are hesitant to move forward, citing the financial burden it could cause. But Martin Ebel, general counsel for the Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination, says not only is it the law, but it can open additional windows for revenue.

Ebel explained what's required during his presentation, Accommodating People with Disabilities – Staying out of Court and Making Money in the Process, at the

USGA Green Section Educational Conference during the Golf Industry Show. Ebel explained most golf courses' responsibilities (and recommended that all courses follow them):

- There should be a policy; it should be written and posted.
- There should be a single-rider golf cart available.
- Golf course employees should be aware of what they can and can't ask of the disabled.

There's no reason not to make the course more accessible, Ebel says. With rounds declining, there's a push to grow the game.

One avenue is to reach out to the more than 54 million disabled people in the country. Plus, the Americans with Disabilities Act applies to most golf courses. All public and municipal courses and most private courses are required to follow it. Plus, it's the right thing to do, he says.

Several arguments against becoming ADA compliant can be disproved, Ebel says. For instance, course operators are often concerned that an ADA upgrade is costly, but Ebel says initial money spent will pay off. Golfers rarely play alone, which means

disabled people likely will bring three others golfers and make it a foursome. And, once word gets out, more disabled golfers will come to play.

It can be more costly not to become ADA compliant because the disabled can file lawsuits against courses that aren't accessible.

"Even if you win at trial, you'll pay \$50,000 to \$100,000," Ebel says, adding it also costs time and aggravation.

He cites the case in 2001 in which pro golfer Casey Martin sued the PGA Tour. Martin suffers from a birth defect in his

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right leg known as Klippel Tre-naunay Weber syndrome, which can make it painful for him to walk, but PGA rules dictated that he was not allowed to use a cart. The ruling changed that.

“Golf cars need to be supplied to those who have trouble walking,” Ebel says. “It’s that simple.”

A single rider cart purchase doesn’t have to put a golf course out of business. Tax credits are available for some courses. If the course’s budget is below \$1 million, the government will likely share the cost of the equipment up to \$10,000 by way of a tax credit.

Another argument against upgrading for the disabled is that equipment like single-rider carts



Martin Ebel discusses the needs of disabled golfers.

can damage the course. Courses, including Pinehurst, that have grass as good as or better than many other courses have single rider carts, Ebel says.

The ADA states golf courses must provide reasonable accommodations. That means the accommodations can’t be expensive, they must provide a safe experience, and they must remove any barriers that might arise for golfers. This includes accessible teeing grounds and weather shelters. There needs to

be a 5-foot-wide path every 75 yards and each green must have a point of entry for the single-rider cart.

Besides the course, parking lots, restrooms, the clubhouse, the pro shop counter and every other aspect of the facility falls under the ADA. The only exemption is if the changes create an undue burden on the course. “This means any alteration so expensive, it would be irresponsible to do it,” Ebel says. However, he adds, it’s hard to prove in court

that the alterations would have caused a burden.

Ebel recommends course managers start by auditing the facility to determine the current level of compliance. If there are changes that could be made, and they don’t create too much of a burden, make the changes. Finally, invest in a single-rider cart.

Despite the ADA and the idea of a possible lawsuit, some golf course owners and managers still are not convinced to spend the money to upgrade. They’re held back by the thought that there is no demand for features that accommodate the disabled.

“I think you’ll find if you build it, they will come,” Ebel says.

— HW



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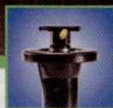
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Dan Schuknecht is the assistant superintendent at Talons of Tuscany Golf Club in Ankeny, Iowa. He serves on the Iowa Golf Course Superintendents board of directors as the Class C representative. He can be contacted at dsschuknecht@msn.com or 515-865-9814.

SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION

It's been difficult for assistant superintendents to further their careers. A job opening for a superintendent position can draw hundreds of applicants.

What can assistants do to compete for the opportunities we desire? We make ourselves marketable. There are many ways to accomplish this. One is through education. We can never stop learning because there are better technologies, strategies and management practices that will produce better results. We're fortunate to have numerous educational opportunities available.

There's something for each of us. It's important to find a course or program that motivates you and will help you accomplish your goals. Every bit of education and training helps us do our jobs more effectively and makes us more marketable for future careers. As the business demands of golf course superintendents increase, there will be a need for advanced degrees and business experience. I decided the best way to reach my desired position was to get an MBA from the University of Iowa. The program gives students the opportunity to learn about all aspects of business in a way that's relatable to their career fields and teaches them how a business is run and how to operate one. Whatever educational track you choose, keep these things in mind:

Leaders are human resource managers. They aren't only responsible for hiring and firing, they help develop their staff into a hard-working, cohesive unit. This takes leadership and the ability to motivate others. Leaders must have people skills to communicate and influence the wealthiest club and board members and those who earn minimum wage. MBA programs require human resource courses to prepare you to succeed when dealing with many types of personalities and backgrounds.

Many program projects are completed in teams, making teamwork an important part of the program. You must be able to sell yourself and your ideas, and establish credibility within your group.

As you learn to depend on the expertise of your classmates, you deal with those who can be difficult to work with to achieve the grades you desire. The diversity I work with in class is similar to what a general manager faces daily when dealing with different department heads and staff members.

Leaders are change managers. They have to lead and influence those around them and have vision to see what the future of their business will be like. Often times the future of our clubs will cause us to change. Last fall, I took a course about change management that taught me how to lead others through change with preparation and communication. I also learned to identify my organization's culture and to develop strategies if I had to change that culture.

For example, say you accept a new position as a superintendent or general manager. You're hired with the expectation of raising performance levels and achieving results but are surrounded by a staff known for underachieving and having a poor work ethic. Create change first by creating a sense of urgency among your staff that necessitates the need for change. Cast a vision to show your staff where you want to go as a team. Empowering others to act on this vision and removing obstacles to change will help as you create momentum through short-term wins. Making changes within your staff and developing staff members to carry out the vision also is an important component of change.

Finally, taking action to ensure the change strategy is carried out long term and the organization's old habits don't come back into common practice can be difficult but is vitally important. These steps are crucial to ensuring a leader can create and keep change and achieve results.

Leaders are resource and financial managers. We care for a club's greatest resource: the golf course. Studies have shown golfers come back because of well kept greens, tees and fairways. This was valued more than all other areas of their experience.

Leaders must find creative ways to deal with increased labor and supply costs and decreasing budgets. They must work to stay under budget while producing a high quality product. I'm enrolled in an accounting class that teaches students to evaluate a company's future viability and success by studying its balance sheet and income and cash flow statements. The class also will be useful when determining if an organization is worth purchasing, managing or investing in.

Leaders are time managers. Those in the industry know time management is a must because successful leaders are given much to accomplish to provide necessary worth and value to their club. Being in our business and continuing with education can be difficult because of time and financial constraints. Working toward achieving an MBA has made me a much better time manager, but it hasn't come without challenges. I continue to work full time and take night and weekend classes. When I started the program last fall, our club was completing the seeding phase of a grow-in. This season will be a test to balance class work load with the challenge of a grow-in. Delegation and managing your "time wasters" can go a long way toward better time management.

The MBA program will help me understand the business side of the golf industry much better. While pursuing an MBA has meant challenge, sacrifice and commitment, it will be worth it. If this educational path is something you're considering, visit www.mba.com. Here are two tips:

- Consider your options. What programs are available that you find interesting and motivating?
- Talk to your employer. Many are supportive of continuing education, and some might offer tuition assistance. Be ready to sell why you want to pursue higher education and how it will benefit your employer.

A leader once said, "If we aren't prepared and educated to make decisions, someone will make them for us, and we probably won't like it." I encourage you to consider education as an opportunity toward career success. **GCI**