

WORKING FROM WITHIN A PRIORITY FRAMEWORK

The maintenance program should be worked out with more than weather in mind . . . At least five other factors have to be considered in setting it up

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Weather as a factor in setting up and following through on the course maintenance program certainly can't be minimized, but considering other influences that are involved, its importance can be overemphasized.

There is one thing that can be said in favor of the weather: Supts. have been coping with its irregularities for so long that they are taken for granted and flexible work programs have been set up to offset many of the disruptions they may cause. What it amounts to is that the irregularities are pretty well taken in stride unless, of course, they are on the violent or prolonged side.

The same, though, can't be said for a number of things that enter into the maintenance picture — meaning the availability of labor and equipment, the time when work can be carried out, budget appropriations and members' attitudes. These are the great imponderables, so far as the average supt. is concerned.

A defense has been set up against the weather. When it's dry for instance, we irrigate; when it's hot and humid, we apply fungicides; if rain is predicted, we may aerate; there is a time for applying the different types of fertilizers and herbicides; when it is extremely hot we know that we must syringe the greens to cool them off.

Actually, the only baffling or uncertain thing about the weather, where most of

us are concerned, is not its present but its potential effect. If we seed or apply a dry fertilizer is our work going to be undone by the brisk winds that may follow within a day or so after we have completed either of these jobs? Are equally strong winds going to minimize the effect of irrigation, or even rain, through too rapid evaporation?

Here, of course, we have to depend on the accuracy of the five-day weather forecasts, or a special kind of instinct that some supts. seem to develop.

The matter of timing maintenance work, or simply getting it in when it doesn't interfere with play, has been attacked from a number of angles in the last two or three years. Night work has proved to be the answer at some clubs; early morning work has enabled others to barely keep ahead of the players who, incidentally, are getting up earlier and earlier to play golf. The traditional Monday course closing has helped the private clubs over the hump. But where night or early morning work isn't practicable and where courses aren't closed on Mondays, maintenance has to be of a hit-and-miss or squeeze-it-in nature. If this isn't enough, the many special events that are held at clubs may place even more restrictions on the supt.

One Day for Maintenance

On Mondays, we are fortunate enough to have the right of way over the golfers. Every club, even the heavily played semi-private or public ones, should set aside one day a week when the maintenance crew has some kind of a work priority. Otherwise, irreparable damage to turf or the golfing landscape itself may result and the cost of replacement in either case may be much higher than the fees realized on that particular day.

Much of our fertilizing is done on Mondays when there is little or no interference. The bulk of aerifying is handled in mid-

May when the plant roots benefit most. Night watering usually starts in mid-June. We try to time our fertilizing so that the greatest benefit to the turf is shown on the days when big events are played. Application may be made a week or only a few days before these tournaments are staged so as to bring the course into full bloom on the appointed days. Of course, we keep an eye on the weather in deciding just when the fertilizer should be applied. We concede there is an ulterior motive in trying to bring the course into its full beauty for the big events. That is, after all, the time to show the members what they are paying for.

Budget May Fluctuate

The budget is another item that can fluctuate from year to year, depending on the whims of the members or officials and to a lesser degree on the economic outlook. It has been my observation, though, that the supt. who gives a business-like accounting of expenditures for the season, and is able to justify the additions that may be requested in a new budget, is going to fare reasonably well in the financial department. Poor record-keeping on the part of the supt. probably has led to more appropriation slashes than any other factor.

Labor has been steadily reduced on golf courses in the last 30 or 40 years because more and more machinery has been introduced. Supts. generally have no quarrel with this, but in some cases club officials don't grasp the idea that the machines they buy aren't automated. The purchase of a new tractor doesn't automatically justify reducing the labor force by one man.

Use Fewer Workers

We have flattened out our annual employment curve by keeping our personnel requirements at four men in the winter and twelve at our summer peak. Only a few years ago it took from 15 to 20 men to maintain a course in the heart of the season. There is no denying that labor continues to take the biggest slice out of the maintenance appropriation and that tight control of the number of men hired has to be exercised. This can be effected only by having more work to be done than possibly can be done with the staff allotted. In short, you never quite catch up with all the work there is to do on a course.

There is no way of minimizing the disrupting effect absenteeism has on a main-



Bob Williams

... have emergency plan ready.

tenance program. We are set up with just enough men to go around on the day's routine jobs, and if someone turns up sick for a day or two, the routine is thrown badly out of line. Two cases of absenteeism on the same day is a minor catastrophe. About the only thing that can be done in a case like this is to try to foresee the effects of absenteeism on the part of one, two or even three men, set up alternate (or disaster) programs that cover all the major work bases, and then hope that you can get through the day. Usually, when an alternate plan is put into effect, the supt. has to handle one of the operational tasks.

Machinery Breakdowns

When a supt. is trying to foresee what will happen when his employees are absent, he should go a step farther and
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Priority Framework

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consider the effects of machinery breakdowns. Almost daily during the playing season it is necessary to make minor, and occasionally major, repairs to a piece of equipment. This costs manhours as well as machine hours. The same kind of alternate programs for filling in for absentee workers has to be figured out for those days when all the machines aren't available. In some cases, improvised methods of transportation or a temporary change in such as mowing assignments may solve the dilemma. Any alternate plan, whether it involves men or machines, has to be based on the job priorities system you have established.

Another factor that may influence the setting up of job priorities or the resorting to an alternate plan is the membership. Special requests that come down from above, the occasional whims of persons who aren't satisfied with the appearance of certain things out on the course or around the clubhouse, or possibly overzealous green chairmen or committeemen, all have a bearing on the way a maintenance program is carried out. It is well known that a priority on something that seems of little import to a supt. may carry a Triple A stamp all

over it. It is a wise supt. who learns to recognize the most pressing orders, requests or suggestions that come from the front office. Yet, in fairness to the people for whom he works and as a measure of self protection, he should do everything possible to carry out members' requests.

Gets a Free Hand

Actually, four out of five supts. aren't burdened with interference or unreasonable orders or requests from the members. In some cases, those that are bring these things on themselves. Generally, if a supt. tries to give a club the best course possible with the money, men and machinery that are at his disposal, he is going to be given pretty much of a free hand in running the maintenance operation.

At Bob O'Link, our whole maintenance effort is set up under a general work priority framework that covers routine operations as well as the alternate or emergency plans that quite often have to be put into effect. In following through on it, we try to make ample allowance for the inconsistencies of the weather, absenteeism, machinery breakdowns and the other factors that certainly have to be taken into account at all times because it never can be assumed that everything is going to run smoothly for even as long as one day.

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Clubhouse and pool of the new Cress Creek CC in Naperville, Ill., are seen in this shot at a swimming exhibition held recently at the club. Cress Creek was officially opened on Memorial Day, but members are playing only the back nine of the 6,300 yard course at the present time.

signed to the playing areas with attention being given to the greens, fairways, tees, traps and roughs in that order. The second priority is given to the clubhouse lawn and range tee. Thereafter, we go down the line in this fashion: General grooming; Parking area and entrance; New construction; Building maintenance; and Landscape maintenance.

Outside of the playing areas and range tee, we may occasionally juggle the order of priority in handling the other maintenance jobs. But we have found that if we stick pretty close to the overall priority pattern, we come within striking distance of getting all the work done that should be done.

Hogan Named Field Rep for Golf Foundation

Dennis J. Hogan, Chicago attorney, has been appointed to the staff of the National Golf Foundation as field representative in the Midwest. He is presently making a comprehensive survey of golf course construction projects in a 15-state area.

A native of Chicago, Hogan is a graduate of De Paul University Law School and has been a practicing attorney since he was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1955. From 1951 to 1954, he served with the U.S. Army in Korea.

As a field representative, Hogan will make the Foundation's vast store of golf course planning and building information experience available to individuals and groups interested in developing new golf projects. These services are free.