

Fencing with the Problem

By JOE DOAN

Vandalism and burglaries are forcing more and more clubs to fence in their courses. The cost can be enormous, but clubs feel the money is well spent

IN the early morning a truck is backed up to a pro shop and a safe winched through a window that's been forced. Youngsters in a stolen car turn onto a club's access road, and with three police cars in pursuit, hurtle across fairways and greens, rutting and tearing up turf over several acres. Livestock from an adjoining farm gets loose and spends the night grazing a course and damaging soft greens with backhoe hoofs. Old stoves, refrigerators and hot water tanks, which householders have trouble getting hauled away, are disposed of behind a 14th green or a 16th tee—and with them maybe the week's garbage.

These are only a few ways in which golf clubs are harassed and set upon. Almost every superintendent has a few favorite stories, if not of depredation, then of how he had night visitors, interlopers, people who stray onto the acres in his custody as if they were in the public domain.

Golf courses long have been favorite trysting spots. Nocturnal fishermen covertly troll their lakes and ponds and in the winter ice skaters will take over if they aren't chased out. Knolls and hillocks offer tempting ski runs at some courses. In the last few years the country club's rolling terrain has beckoned snowmobilers.

These are the more innocuous types of interlopers. Clubs and superintendents might be inclined to suffer them if they were sure their numbers could be controlled. But they rarely are. If a few skaters or skiers are permitted to use a course, ultimately they are followed by many more. Severe damage to snow covered turf may result if there is too much skiing. A club may become exposed to a lawsuit if a mishap occurs as the result of people ice skating.

As for love-ins, the biggest drawback to them is that so many take place in the spring. "If," as one superintendent says, "the trysters would stick to the blacktop and macadam and not drive out on the course, we might tolerate them. Probably we wouldn't know that they paid us a visit. But too many of them, looking for a secluded spot, stray from the clubhouse grounds and damage the soft turf on the course."

Non-malicious trespassers easily outnumber those in-

tent on larceny or destruction. At first thought this is good, but petty thievery by non-malicious types can cost a club quite a bit of money. Mostly they are after flagsticks, tee markers or signs, but sometimes they make off with hoses, sprinkler heads and benches. It isn't unheard of for a club to have some of its shrubbery dug up and carried off. Generally, these people come under the souvenir hunter category or, at least, they aren't felonious. But whatever their classification it can't be overlooked that a flagpole costs \$7 or \$8, a sprinkler head is worth around \$20 and a bench from \$25 to \$50.

What causes golf clubs the most distress, of course, are vandals and people intent on robbing pro shops, clubhouses and maintenance buildings. Whether they are more of a menace now than ever before is open to question. There has been a lot of vandalism and burglarizing of country clubs going on for the last 15 to 20 years. Speakers at two or three national Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America conventions have discussed vandalism in recent years. For the most part it has been in connection with the senseless damage done to greens. As for burglaries, pro shops have been prime targets. Consignment stealing, dictated by hoodlums who fence stolen goods, seems to break out somewhere every spring. Clubhouses and maintenance buildings haven't escaped looting on a rather large scale.

There is no denying that golf clubs are at the mercy of all kinds of predators, malicious or otherwise. Out in the open, away from everything, as many of them are, they are rather easy targets. Most have taken steps to protect their properties, but because of their sprawling nature, it isn't easy. Various types of alarm systems, night watchmen, the employment of private or public police services have proved to be only partly adequate. Clubs are still looking for better protection measures.

One of these is the fencing of properties. It wouldn't be accurate to say that this is a new idea, nor by any means the full solution to the security problem. But in the last

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three or four years more and more clubs have been turning to fencing. It provides not only greater interior security, but protection for those who live or travel outside the fence. People who live in homes immediately adjoining courses are usually glad to see a club put up a fence, since it gives their persons and properties added protection against the hazard of flying golf balls. And, of course, the same kind of protection is given where streets and highways run parallel to courses.

One club manager recently said that he was greatly relieved when his club finally realized that it should erect a fence adjoining a busy highway. In his five years at the club he had paid at least a dozen windshield claims. He was living in fear of the day when a golf ball struck a car and caused a really serious accident. It would have made the club liable to a lawsuit that might have put it out of business. He was able to convince the members of this serious problem and an 18-foot fence was erected.

Installation of a fence, however, will not reduce the club's premium. But it could have an indirect affect. A fence may reduce the club's loss experience, which has a substantial influence on the premium, according to a spokesman for a major insurance firm.

A club has one other highly important responsibility in protecting outsiders. Courts have ruled in several cases that a country club grounds is an "attractive nuisance" and, therefore, children even though they may stray onto a course, have to be protected from its hazards. Several years ago, GOLFDOM reviewed a case in which a child was injured while playing around machinery and the club had to pay his medical and hospital bills. In another case, a child was drowned in a lake on a course and the club was held liable. In both instances the courts ruled that the clubs were negligent because they did not provide a fence or similar barricade around these hazards.

As already mentioned, a fence doesn't answer a club's security problem. Far from it. Joe Cuthbertson of the All-

state Fence Company, Oak Lawn, Ill., whose company has erected six-foot chain link fences, topped out with barb wire, for several golf clubs in the Chicago area, quotes an old fence proverb in speaking of his product: "Fences keep out honest people." He goes on to say that a vandal, petty thief or burglar can get through any fence if he has a little resolve. All he has to do is climb it, in spite of barbs, go under it or use a pair of three-eighths-inch bolt cutters to go through it.

So what good is a fence?

It serves as a deterrent. A man with vandalism or larceny in his heart more often than not is too lazy, doesn't have enough resolve, to climb or tunnel a fence. If he finds one he probably won't bother to probe it, but will go to the next course and look for a walk-in.

A substantial six-foot fence, the kind surrounding golf courses, parks or industrial properties is an expensive proposition. A chain link, such as a Cyclone fence, may cost \$3.50 a foot or more for the deluxe installation, which includes either concrete or tri-set bases and a two-inch top bar around the complete circuit. Multiply this by 10,000 or 15,000 feet, the area you may wish to enclose, and the cost is substantial. So substantial, in fact, that many clubs have their fences installed in sections over a period of several years.

Many clubs only fence off areas that face streets, highways and adjoining properties, omitting fencing where the property isn't open to access roads or where there is only light trespassing. Butterfield CC, Hinsdale, Ill., for example, fenced in 9,000 of 12,000 feet when it had its installation made in 1968. Its neighbor across the highway, Midwest CC, closed in about 10,500 feet, two-thirds of its course, when it erected its fence about a decade ago. Midwest, incidentally, made the installation over four years.

Fencing is a job for specialists and is almost always done on contract. If a superintendent and his crew were to attempt it, installation time probably would cost more than if a contracting company were to do it, and the latter would probably have to come in and shore up the job. A three-man, experienced fence crew can install about 100 yards a day. Poles are set 10 feet apart, top bars are connected to them and the fence is hung from the top bars with the aid of a three-fourths to 1 1/2-ton hoist. The chain link is then stretched at the bottom with a cable pull and the entire fence is secured to the poles. Where the ground is firm, concrete is used as a base in the post holes. When it is swampy, tri-set anchors are set in the holes and the upright poles bolted to them.

Usually, the course maintenance crew prepares the right-of-way along the fence line. Ideally, this calls for the removal of trees, bushes and brush and a 10-foot swath cleared so that there is maneuvering room for the concrete truck and other equipment used on the job. Some superintendents, however, prefer to have bushes abreast the fence, making it necessary for the fencing crew to work around them. Usually it can be arranged, but at an additional cost

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Fencing hints

- A six-foot, chain link fence may cost \$3.50 a foot or more for an installation which includes either concrete or tri-set bases and a two-inch top bar around the complete circuit.
- Because of the expense only fencing in areas that face streets, highways or adjoining properties has become common practice.
- Fencing should be done by a reliable and experienced company. A three-man fence crew can install about 100 yards a day.
- Check carefully all available descriptive land pattern materials, which can be obtained from local, county engineering or assessment offices. If the fence has to be moved because it violates property lines, the club is responsible for the expense.
- Frequently, allowance is not made for the barb wire overhang, which can angle over an adjoining property and can result in a lawsuit. Regulations regarding overhangs are stipulated in building codes. These codes should be checked thoroughly before building begins.

FENCING

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to the club for the extra time it would take.

More important than getting the right-of-way clear is making sure no violation of property lines occurs when the fence is installed. Deeds, aerial photos and mosaics, maps and other descriptive land pattern materials which the club may have, or can be obtained from local or county engineering or assessment offices, should be studied carefully so that there is no chance that the fence, or any section of it, is installed beyond the club's property line. The company that makes the installation makes it very clear in its contract that it is not responsible for violations of property lines. If all or part of a fence has to be moved because of an encroachment, it is at the property owner's expense. Art White, who operates a fence contracting firm in Villa Park, Ill., which handled the Butterfield installation plus those of several other Chicago area clubs, points out that contractors are called back surprisingly often to make corrections because of property line violations when a fence is installed.

In a great many cases this is because allowance is not made for the barb wire overhang. If the overhang is offset, as it usually is, and angles over the adjoining property, correction had better be made or a lawsuit may result. Regulations regarding overhangs are stipulated in building codes.

The building code, incidentally, should be closely checked before installation is begun. Codes supposedly are fairly uniform, but some have exceptions that may confound the property owner who is constructing a fence. For instance, three strands of barb wire may be permitted in some places, but only one in others. If a chain link fence is only five feet high it is illegal to top it with barb wire. Another important point to be checked in

the building codes is how close a fence can be built to an intersection without violation.

Westgate CC in Chicago, which is now completing fencing its two 18-hole courses, has taken no chances on property line violations. In the last seven or eight years it has put in approximately four miles of fences and before starting each new section, it has had the sectional property line surveyed. The

final link, which runs to about 2,700 feet, was surveyed this spring at a cost of only \$100. The inner fences at Westgate adjoin a county highway and are set back 20 feet on both sides of the county roadway.

How far a fence has to be installed from a street or highway is a point that should be checked while preparations for installation are being made. □

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