EXTEND YOUR SEASON AND PROFIT

The whole club benefited when an inventive superintendent experimented with wetting agents and increased playability and over-all revenue at his golf course

Heavy clay areas on the course cause severe compaction problems. These areas receive extra doses of wetting agents in the spring and late fall.

Wetting agents will rapidly move off this March flood water.

A very trying time occurs for a golf course superintendent when he must close down the course because of a heavy rainfall, flooding or standing water. Everyone suffers—the clubhouse loses bar and dining income, golf cars cannot be taken out on the course, and because no one can play golf, the professional's golf shop is generally deserted—the members stay home.

One superintendent experimenting with wetting agents has been able to compile facts and figures over a four year period to show that the program has stretched the golfing season and increased revenue for the club.

Editor's note: This article presents the experience of only one superintendent who utilized wetting agents to break up standing water. The superintendent notes that the program may not work for every course. Therefore, before anyone goes into a full-scale program, he should seek expert advice and opinion and should experiment with a small plot of land to determine what the reaction of his course would be to such a program.

Prior to the use of wetting agents, he writes GOLFDOM, his golf course was closed an average of 10 days during the golfing season. These closures were the result of either heavy rainfall, where the water could not percolate down into the soil fast enough for the resuming of play the next day, or the periodic flooding of a river which flows through the middle of the course. When the river waters receded, he

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Wetting agents help hold Poa annua fairways during July stress period.

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explained, the water was left standing for days cutting off some holes.

Then the superintendent went to a program using wetting agents to combat the sogginess of his course. The superintendent started by spraying greens, tees and fairways on a weekly schedule beginning the fourth week in May through the second week in September.

One of this superintendent's major problems is the composition of the soil itself. One nine is silt loam with good drainage, another nine is heavy clay with compaction. He also maintains 96 per cent *Poa annua* fairways. This possesses problems of its own, but he has found that wetting agents have helped hold *Poa* through stress periods by making the water wetter. He also feels that wetting agents greatly reduce the amount of compaction and thatch at his course. In the past, he reports, keeping turf at or near field capacity has been the only way of holding *Poa* through stress. Now a lower volume of water is required, keeping saturated ground to a minimum. Even with reduced watering, areas such as greens are now able to maintain their resiliency for holding golf shots.

The superintendent's program calls for use of 125 gallons of wetting agents throughout the year to be used on greens, tees and fairways. This investment in wetting agents amounts to $1,200. However, he says, this is easily offset because of the increased revenues the club receives from golf cars, green fees and the clubhouse. Over the four-year period he has found that the number of days the course has been closed due to wet grounds has been reduced by 50 per cent. Because the course is open an additional 50 per cent on rainy days, this also permits golf cars out more than in other years prior to the use of wetting agents. His private course averages 22,000 rounds of golf over an eight-month playing season. An extra five or six days a year adds thousands of dollars to club coffers, especially on weekends. Car revenue prior to the use of wetting agents for one random year was $37,000. In 1971 using the wetting agents, the club grossed $44,000 from golf car concessions. Allowing for heavier play and more golfing days, it is still a substantial increase.

Perhaps the most beneficial result of the use of wetting agents was in improving golfers' attitudes. Because the course was open these additional days, they could play more, and the use of wetting agents also aided the agronomic composition of the turf, thereby giving the members better playing conditions, according to the course superintendent.

To apply wetting agents on fairways the superintendent uses a boom jet nozzle sprayer mounted on a tractor. He sprays his 36-acre fairways weekly using two ounces of wetting agent per 1,000-square feet. A spring and late fall application calls for eight ounces of wetting agents per 1,000-square feet. The fall spraying is done about the second week in October. The superintendent feels this fall spraying has helped get chemicals used for combating snow mold into the thatch zone, thus giving better control of snow mold. Severely compacted areas get approximately eight ounces of wetting agent per 1,000-square feet. These compacted areas are sprayed every two weeks until good moisture movement is evident. The rate for application of wetting agents to greens and tees is the same as for fairways, but a vehicle mounted sprayer with boom is used. The clay areas get an additional application of eight ounces per 1,000-square feet every two weeks.

The 54 club-owned cars have caused fewer compaction problems with a treatment of two ounces per 1,000-square feet every 10 days on the heavily-traveled areas.

Height of cut for the golf course because of wetting agents is: Greens, five-fifty-seconds inch; tees and collars, one-half inch, and fairways, three-fourths inch.

In summary, the advantages this superintendent has found with wetting agents are:

- ☐ Reduced compaction;
- ☐ Less watering;
- ☐ Reduced problems with thatch;
- ☐ Better grass and drainage in car wear areas;
- ☐ Better membership relations due to less course-closed days because of wet grounds;
- ☐ Syringing has been eliminated from once or twice to nothing;
- ☐ The course is capable of supporting more golf cars;
- ☐ Increased club revenue;
- ☐ Better grass over-all.

The superintendent is quick to point out that wetting agents for use in breaking up standing water on fairways, tees and greens may not work for every course, because each course is different. He recommends experimenting with a small plot of land to find the right application rates for your needs before going into a full-scale program with wetting agents. ☐