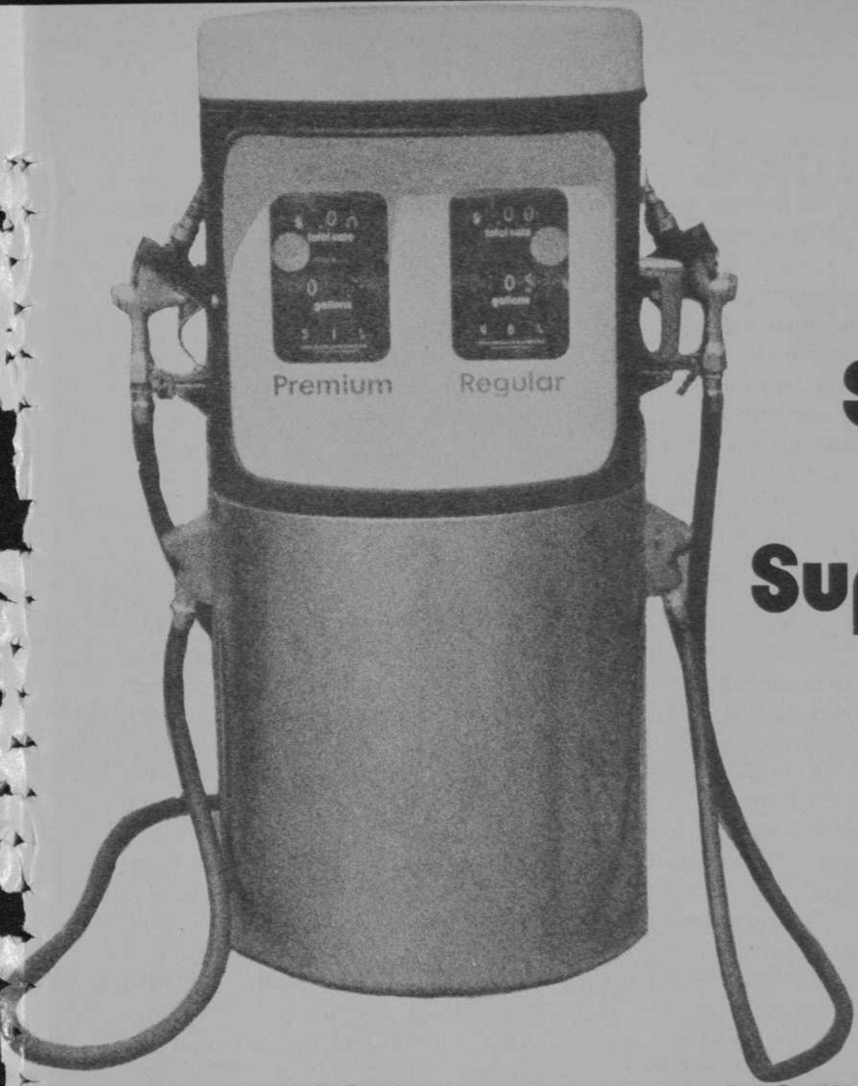

Budgeting and Planning 1974

The Gasoline Shortage: How Will It Affect Superintendents?

Superintendents should be prepared to add to their fuel budgets next year. Although extent of the fuel shortage varies throughout the country, price increases definitely will occur

EAST

by DOUGLAS LUTZ

NEW YORK—The nationwide gasoline shortage is beginning to affect the cost of maintenance operations from Maine to Florida. It is not viewed as a major problem as yet at most East Coast courses, but growing concerns have been expressed.

Several superintendents have already taken steps to ensure their gasoline needs for the current season. Others have begun to feel the price increase pinch. Still others have had no problems to date other than the occasional inconvenience of a day or two wait for their normal deliveries. There have been few instances of short supply, a kind of rationing on the part of the suppliers when their own reserves have not been replenished quickly enough.

In talking to several superintendents and course representatives, no particular trend covering the entire area (Maine to Florida) seemed to emerge. The shortage and its attendant problems appears

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CENTRAL

by JOE DOAN

CHICAGO—The Great Gasoline Shortage of 1973, which for a time this spring had superintendents here wondering to what extent they would be forced to curtail course maintenance, turned out to be a myth. Not a single one of more than a dozen superintendents who were queried in late July had missed having his storage tank filled on a regular weekly or bi-weekly basis. And the prospect was that the uninterrupted flow would continue. In fact, most superintendents say that their suppliers have told them that there is no need to start worrying ahead for 1974, because supplies will be adequate next year. However, the word has gone out to budget an extra 10 per cent, because a 1974 price increase is inevitable.

In July, superintendents were paying an average of about $.30 a gallon for gasoline. This included taxes. Three or four months earlier, the price was approximately $.28. More than half of the superinten-

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WEST

by DON CURLEE

SAN FRANCISCO—The current "gasoline shortage," if there is one, has not threatened golf maintenance programs at any courses on the West Coast, but it has resulted in inconveniences in a few cases.

Gasoline prices here have increased since April from one to three cents a gallon, but most superintendents feel that they have enough cushion in this part of their budgets to ride out 1974 and all are optimistic that the price will level off—with or without the help of Federal controls.

To some degree it seems to depend on the supplier. Superintendents who purchase their petroleum products from one popular supplier report that they have received repeated assurances they will have all the gasoline they need. Cuts have been made by a couple of other suppliers.

One superintendent in Daly City said that he is lucky because the local distributor for a certain com-

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to be local in nature.

Fred McPheters, professional and superintendent at Kebo Valley GC in Bar Harbor, Maine, said, "We've had no problems whatsoever. The AAA has told us there should be no problem with the gasoline shortage in Maine this year."

Pierre "Pete" Coste, superintendent at famed The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., says, "We'll be all right this summer. We were dry a day or two when a regular delivery failed to appear recently and once we got only 150 gallons in our 500 gallon tank. Our delivery service handles commercial accounts, so I guess we're not considered high priority." Coste reported no price increase had been levied.

Before The Country Club closes their main 18 holes in mid-November Coste will average 240 gallons usage a week as opposed to 230 last year. The nine hole layout remains open all year, weather permitting. Using jeeps for snow plowing and clearing the pond for ice skating as well as dump trucks

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dents reported that they had been assessed a $.02 increase in May or June, while in some cases discounts amounting to roughly 10 per cent had been withdrawn. Because most vehicles used in course maintenance aren't driven on highways, country and golf clubs are entitled to what is known as an agricultural rebate, which amounts to $.07.5 a gallon. In Illinois, the rebate is made quarterly, and application for the refund has to be made.

One Southside supplier, which includes a half dozen clubs among its gas customers, has all of its accounts on an allocation status, based on 1972 deliveries. Most other bulk supply firms operate on a similar arrangement. For 1974, this company has been informed by its refiner supplier that it will get about 4 per cent more gas than it has been allotted this year. Thus, it will be able to service its present accounts, although there is little likelihood that it will be able to take on new business.

When rumors of a gasoline shor-

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pany is a member of his club. "We're not expecting any shortages," he asserted.

Another superintendent in the San Francisco Bay Area complained of reduced quantity in each of his last three deliveries. His tank holds 500 gallons and he has received 300, 150 and 200 the last three times.

"On a few occasions," he said, "we've had to run downtown for a couple of cans of gas at the corner service station just to finish mowing." He said formerly that a fill-up every two weeks was enough, "but now we're calling every week because it may be a week before the truck shows up." He averages about 1,000 gallons a month, with heaviest use in the long summer days.

In the Los Angeles area, one superintendent said he received only 94 per cent of his normal usage since May 1. He buys from a different supplier than the one mentioned previously, and said other superintendents buying from

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for spreading sand will account for 75 to 80 gallons a week this winter.

Although supplies have been at average levels, Coste added a somber note when he talked about quality. "We've had poor performance from our gasoline on occasion. The quality levels seem lower, perhaps some additives are being left out. Poor starting and continued combustion after shutting off the engines has been troublesome."

A spokesman for a major oil company, who declined to be named or have the company identified, commented on the question raised by Coste's findings at The Country Club.

"I know of no oil company cutting down on quality. The industry is under attack constantly these days. As you must be aware we're even having trouble convincing everyone of the reality of the shortage, which we have warned about for some time. In certain parts of the country there are acute shortages. In other areas, enforced rationing. Golf course operators will have to bear the burden along with all other gasoline users." Executives at other oil companies were not reachable for comments on the potential problems faced by golf course maintenance fleet fuel shortages.

Robert Feindt, superintendent at the Country Club of Rochester (N.Y.) is on a quota system based on 1972 usage. Although this assures steady delivery it could also become a problem, according to Feindt. "Last year we had a light September, which could cause us a problem this September, because our monthly quota of gasoline is based on 1972's consumption. If we went into any construction it could also create a problem for us. We use 6,800 gallons a year and during our busiest months, June, July and August, we run to 900 gallons, delivered. We've had no problems on deliveries as yet. Our

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tage were making the rounds in March and April, superintendents prepared for it in two ways. Most immediately, they started looking for backup suppliers, but as Harold Fredericksen of Edgewater Valley in La Grange, observed, "With everyone looking for a secondary supply source, all would have been quickly exhausted. We were lucky we weren't ultimately faced with the problem." Fredericksen never felt any pinch. If he had, he figures that it would have been alleviated within his own club, because several of his members are in the fuel supply business. Many other superintendents, fortunately, are in the same position.

A second way of coping with possible shortages would have been to cut back on maintenance programs. Several superintendents did this, just in case, and now are going along with the new routine. For example, Bruce Burchfield of Calumet CC reduced tee mowing from three or four times a week to two or three times and eliminated one weekly pass over the fairways with the mowers. He justifies the curtailed schedule, as do other superintendents, by reminding members, if they ask, that the gas situation even now could become critical in the Midwest, as it has farther west.

"Actually," said Burchfield, "very few members would ever notice that you've cut back on maintenance, unless it's on the greens. It's only a finicky few who would detect it. With these people you have to point out the facts of life."

If a real emergency arose, superintendents figure they could get by with one less vehicle or two, if they absolutely had to. As it is now, most 18-hole courses use an average of eight vehicles, including tractors and utility cars, in addition to mowers. Over-all gas consumption is probably more directly proportional to course acreage than to the number of vehicles in operation, although the frequency of mowing has to be figured in there somewhere. Weather also is a factor, because mowing frequency is closely tied to it. Because these several factors offer some alternatives, supertendents reason that they can find a way out if a gas pinch ever became unusually severe. It wouldn't be easy, but it could be done. □

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his supplier have told him of similar cuts.

"We've had to supplement by taking cans to the service station," he said. "We were lucky enough to find one out-of-the-way station that filled three 50-gallon drums for us. The main loss has been in the time required to stop the equipment and go after gasoline. It's a real nuisance." He uses about 1,000 gallons a month also.

Another Los Angeles area superintendent said that his supplier is living up to his contract, which calls for deliveries as necessary on a "keep full" basis.

"But the price keeps going up," he said. "When we switched to our current supplier about a year ago, the price was about 27 cents a gallon, and now it's over 31 cents." He's another 1,000 gallon a month customer. He has budgeted $4,000 for gas, oil and lubricants for the 1973 to 1974 fiscal year, the same as 1972 to 1973, when he spent less than $3,000, so he feels comfortable.

None of the superintendents interviewed by GOLFDOM could think of ways to fight gasoline cutbacks, but they all agreed this is no time to switch. All who have inquired about changing suppliers have been refused; the suppliers simply won't accept new customers.

One of the enterprising ones has talked to others who are thinking about converting their equipment to propane (liquified petroleum) if the gasoline hoses run any drier. "The rule of thumb is that a year's operation saves the cost of converting the engine to propane," he said, "and we expect our tractors and other equipment to run longer than that." He said that propane users report no oil dilution and no contamination of the oil by carbon and no smog control devises are required. "I'd prefer it over diesel by a long way," he said. Natural gas is not considered a practical alternative in California.

One superintendent in San Mateo said that he is getting all the gasoline he needs and has been working extra long hours to catch up with work that couldn't be done during the rainy spring.

"Everybody we've talked to is getting plenty of gas," he said.

That's why it can't be reported with certainty that a gasoline shortage exists—at least here in California. □

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tanks are filled automatically, sometimes twice a month." Feindt reported a recent price increase of one penny a gallon, however, so the situation in western New York is changing, too.

The local nature of the shortage problem is confined in that Merion in Ardmore, Pa., just 80 miles south of Mt. Manor GC, is facing price increases of three cents a gallon or 10 per cent over last year.

Richie Valentine, Merion's superintendent, has reported no delivery interruptions except once when he received a half tank. "During June, July and August we average 1,200 gallons a month," Valentine said recently, "and when we're not mowing as heavily in April, May, September and October, we run about 800 gallons a month. The rest of the year we'll use 350 gallons a month unless we have heavy snow plow work to do."

World renowned Merion, host to the United States Open in 1934, 1950 and 1971, will probably use 9,000 gallons of gasoline to service its two 18s this year. The 10 per cent increase in cost will add $270 to the club's yearly maintenance budget.

"Sure, there will have to be price increases," a distributor in the Philadelphia area responded recently. "Our costs are rising too. Price spirals are not necessarily caused by shortages. Most of us will try to be fair and allocate our own supplies to our regular customers. I don't think distributors should be the ones to decide who has priority usage of available gasoline." He went on to explain the individual aspects of each situation indicating there was no real pattern to the effects the shortage was having. "It's possible, I suppose," he added, "some distributors may consider golf courses low priority users. I don't see it that way, though."

The Congressional CC in Bethesda, Md., seems to be one of the hardest hit courses. Warren Bidwell, Congressional's superintendent, was recently informed by his supplier he could only expect 70 per cent of his 1972 monthly purchases for comparable months in 1973. As disastrous as that may seem, it's an improvement over the supplier's original threat of only 57 per cent of last year's consumption.

To meet his immediate needs, Bidwell reported, "I just had to go out and buy some gasoline at retail. It cost $.41 to $.42 a gallon." He paid $.33 a gallon wholesale for approximately 9,680 gallons consumed in 1972.

Congressional's 27 holes, during peak periods in May, June, July, August and September, use an average of 1,200 gallons a month. March, April, October and November, 650 gallons. January, February and December, 220 gallons (Based on 1972 figures). These averages total 9,260 gallons. The remaining 420 gallons were consumed during construction projects in February and September.

Projecting Congressional's plight well beyond what anyone would like to consider at this time, if deliveries stopped entirely and each superintendent had to go the retail route, cost increases might prove truly disastrous for some operations. Specifically, a nine-hole layout using an average of 3,090 gallons a year would pay $247.20 more for gasoline at the retail level of $.41 a gallon. An 18-hole course using 6,180 gallons, $494.40! (Both calculations based on comparing $.33 a gallon wholesale and $.41 retail.)

Reaching down the East Coast to our southernmost state, we talked with Jim Sanders, manager at Pine Lakes GC in Jacksonville, Fla. Sanders recently has had to specify the number of gallons he needs prior to delivery, whereas in the past his supplier would simply come around and fill his tank.

"So far, we've had no trouble," Sanders explained but added, "Knock on wood." He has not had a price increase and feels the situation in his area is fairly stable. "I'm keeping my fingers crossed," he says.

East Coast operators and superintendents may have to face the reality of the fuel crisis in terms of rising costs. It may be the only way to "share the burden," as the oil company official has suggested.

There appears to be little that can be done directly to forestall the inevitable dry period. Budget planning for 1974 should take this into account. □