

Effective management of your height of cut requires diligence and focus to get it right

By **Frank H. Andorka Jr.**  
Managing Editor

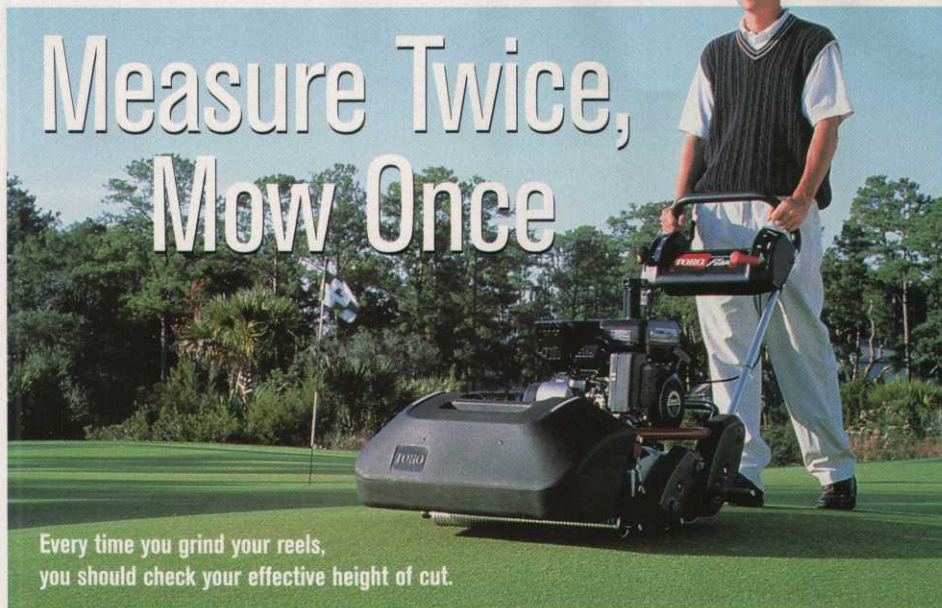
**S**uperintendents' jobs often hang on the quality of their greens.

Golfers can forgive a little brown turf in the rough and even occasionally on the fairway. But when they get to the pin, they expect perfection.

That's why superintendents must closely monitor their greensmowers' height of cut to ensure they're actually cutting at the heights their patrons expect. Here are some tips from the experts about how to get it done:

■ **Know the difference between your bench height of cut and your effective height of cut.**

There's often confusion about the difference between a greensmower's bench height of cut and its effective height of cut, says Tracy Lanier, John Deere's administrative manager of golf and turf market



THE TORO CO.

development. Some superintendents assume that once you've set the bench height of cut, that's all you have to do.

"It's not a situation where all you have to do is set it and forget it," Lanier says.

"The way the mower is transported to the green, the condition of the turf, the type of green — all these factors can change the height of cut after the mower leaves your building."

The cut quality will give you hints about whether it's out-of-whack or not, says Gary Kuhl, product training manager for Textron's Golf, Turf and Specialty Products division.

"If you expect your greens to look like a pool table and you notice the turf looks like shag carpeting, you have a problem," Kuhl

**Using a prism gauge allows superintendents to measure their effective height of cut against their bench height of cut.**

says. "You have to rely on your own instincts, but you will notice a difference if the machine is out of alignment."

Always remember that the bench cut is merely a guide, Kuhl says. You'll have to get out on the green and measure the effective height of cut to see if you're cutting at the height you planned, he adds.

■ **Do the regularly scheduled maintenance on the machine.**

Don Schnotala, senior program manager in commercial engineering for The Toro Co., says superintendents must perform the scheduled maintenance on their mowers so all parts work as intended.

"The reels will wear down over time as you mow," Schnotala says. "That wear will eventually affect your height-of-cut, requiring you to readjust your height of cut setting."

The same applies to grinding the reels, Schnotala says. Every time you sharpen the reels, you have to check your height of cut. At today's

low mowing heights, thousandths of an inch matter.

■ **Check the alignment of the machine to make sure the bedknives are wearing evenly.**

Your mechanic should align the reels with the front rollers, Kuhl says. If those two components aren't square, the cutting unit should be adjusted until they are.

"The roller should be flat and the reel should parallel it," Lanier says. "You should check those every 30 days."

■ **Understand the effect different attachments have on height of cut.**

The type of roller you attach to the mowers will affect the effective height of cut, Schnotala says. Solid rollers give the overall mower more support, which in turn lessens the pressure on the turf because they disperse the weight over a wider area. Grooved rollers, on the other hand, cause the mower to sink lower into the turf, thereby cutting lower.

"That's something you have to factor into your cal-

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JOHN DEERE



# Presenting the Perfect Cup

Experts provide tips and tricks superintendents can use to provide golfers with an ideal hole

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It's one of the ongoing struggles of superintendents' lives. When you cut cups in the morning, they're ideal. By the middle of the afternoon, however, you start hearing complaints from golfers that the holes look ragged around the edges and that the cups are dirty. When golfers get cranky, superintendents are often the ones they blame. Fortunately, there are a few tips and tricks a superintendent can use to present the perfect cup to the last golfer of the day as well as the first.

John Kelly, president of Standard Golf, says superintendents should change cup locations daily. "If you leave the cup in one place all the time, it will have a



tendency to get all chewed up," Kelly says.

Darren Davis, director of golf course operations at Olde Florida GC in Naples, Fla., says his club cuts new holes several feet away from old cups that haven't healed yet so golfers don't have their putts interrupted by an old plug.

Second, superintendents should paint the edges of their cups as soon as they cut them, says Steve Garske, president of Par Aide. "You want to keep the hole as visible as possible all day, and

painting the cups will help you do that," he says.

Richard Browne, president of U.S. Golf Hole Target Systems, says keeping the hole visible all day is nearly as important as keeping the edges clean. Visible holes speed players around the course and can increase the number of golfers who play at your course by 10 to 15 percent, he says. "If you're not paying attention to visibility, you're leaving a lot of revenue on the table in unplayed rounds," Browne says.

Garske also recommends inserting plastic rings in the holes into the top inch of the cup, which increases the stability of the sides of the hole. Part of the problem is the composition of sand-based greens, Kelly says. When you don't have a solid soil surface in which to cut the cup, the edges break down quickly. The sand falls into the bot-

tom of the cup, leaving golfers wondering why their balls are covered in gunk after sinking a 30-foot putt.

Keeping your cup-cutter sharp also means a more stable hole, says Joe Traficano, certified superintendent at Renegade GC at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz. He also carries a 5-gallon bucket of water with him so he can water the edges of the hole so they don't dry out. "If the green dries out, you're much more likely to have sand fall into the bottom of the cup by the end of the day," Traficano says.

Davis says the cup-cutter should be inserted into the green at a 90-degree angle to ensure the cleanest cut possible. He also says his crew members are instructed to wipe the hole liner clean every time it's placed into the ground to maintain visibility. ■

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culations," Kuhl says. "If you don't, it can throw off your effective height of cut."

■ **Transport the equipment carefully to the greens.**

It doesn't take much to throw a mower out of alignment, so superintendents should transport their mowers to greens properly, Lanier says.

"If you're taking it out to the green and your operator drops it as he's unloading it from the truck, that will throw it off," Lanier says. "You have to be careful."

Schnotala says superintendents should train crew members to mount the mowers properly for transport to protect against mishaps.

■ **Evaluate underlying conditions on the greens.**

It's not just the mower that can affect height of cut. The conditions of the greens can also give superintendents a less-than-optimal cut as well.

"If the ground is wet, the mower may sink into the green and cut far lower than the superintendent intended," Schnotala says. "You want to make the

mower as light as possible under those conditions."

Kuhl also says the style of green construction can affect the height of cut.

■ **Use a prism gauge to check your effective height of cut.**

The only way to tell for sure if you're mowing your greens at the height you and your golfers expect is to check them with a prism gauge, Lanier says.

"There's no substitute for getting down on your hands and knees and checking the height of cut on a regular basis," Lanier says.

"You're only going to be able to tell whether you're cutting at the height you think you are if you run this kind of check periodically."

Kuhl says superintendents owe it to themselves to avoid the problems of improperly mowed greens by managing their height of cut effectively.

"The greens are the pride and joy of most superintendents, so they should go to great lengths to keep them healthy," Kuhl says. "Height of cut is an important component of that." ■