

The watermelon-size lump in your stomach says it all. Your eyes can't focus. "It" has happened. You've been playing poker with Mother Nature, and she just threw down an aces-over-kings full house while you bet and bluffed and bet again while clutching a pair of deuces. Nice try turf guy, but you just lost.

It is no mistake that I'm writing this for summertime viewing. Because, face it, summer and growing grass have always had a front-row seat together in the play of *Les Turf Miserables*.

Tragedy happens. You think you have it all figured out. Then, without warning, something that is no fault of your own goes wrong. It could be Abnormal Weather Influenza or any combination of things to create illness at your facility.

I've been on the receiving end of the 9-1-1 calls when nature goes wild. I wish I'd kept some of the recordings because they are unbelievable. Although the events and circumstances are all different, there are a few common denominators to share in the pain.

What I'm talking about here is not "invented events." Not much is as dishonorable as dreaming up an overpowering invader to cover for a major screw-up or general inability. Giving a disease or insect or some other technical name to the wreck you created is just bad form, and you'll go directly to Karma Jail without passing Go and collecting your \$200. If you kill some grass, fall on your sword and take the pain.

Premonition or not

When you wake up on the morning of your personal turfgrass tragedy, you might have a bit of a bad feeling. I've heard this time and again — that somehow victims didn't know what, but they knew something was going to happen. I remember a superintendent telling me that the day before a forest fire started a few blocks from his golf course that he knew "something" wasn't right.

This isn't true in all cases, however. Plenty of superintendents never have a guess that something is about to go wrong.

The nature of being a superintendent means that you are the go-to person at your facility. Being "in the know" is a key trait of superinten-

Welcome to 'Les Turf Miserables'

BY DAVE WILBER



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dents. Don't be surprised that everyone will likely think and expect that you have the answers. And that's a key point: Nothing will earn you a pink slip faster for an event that isn't your fault than coming up with some silly bit of turfspeak to explain it. If you don't know the answer, don't pretend you do.

A selfless survivor

No doubt that you're feeling down when all 18 greens just died or your shop just burned down. And you'll definitely have a fleeting moment where you just know that you should have updated your résumé. But the situation at hand demands your attention, and worries about yourself may be best kept to yourself. The true survivor of the storm is selfless and shows it.

Second-guessing is part of growing turf and hindsight is always clear. You'll ask yourself, "What if I woulda ...?"

And there might even be some answers that you could share with others if you find something that may have helped lessen the impact. A downward spiral of self-doubt could, however, cause you to go past introspection and break down.

A superintendent once told me that if "he" just would have built the shop on higher ground, the flood wouldn't have destroyed all his equipment. I suggested to him that the clubhouse, built on the highest spot on the property, flooded too. Thus, short of creating the "hovering shop," there was nothing he could have done.

Turfgrass tragedy happens and when (not if) it happens to you, don't be afraid to remember that you aren't and won't be the only one it happens to.

There's healing in that knowledge.

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