

Eco-Terrorism

Is the golf industry taking the threat seriously?

The greens at the Pines Country Club were a disturbing sight. They had been mashed with baseball bats and gashed with shovels. The greens were badly scarred with deep, jagged craters. Large and small chunks of earth, the remains of the damaged turf, were strewn about. Mike TenEyck, general manager of the



and Golf

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Pines in Valley, Neb., was shaken when he first saw the defaced greens on the July morning in 2001. He was astonished when he found out who was responsible for the \$5,000 in destruction. Members of the Earth Liberation Front or ELF, an international underground eco-terrorist group, caused the damage.

ELF, which has cells of people who act independently throughout the United States, says its goal is to inflict damage on those profiting from the destruction and exploitation of the natural environment. ELF and related radical groups view golf course maintenance, whether it's applying herbicides or applying fertilizer, as ruinous to the environment.

Pines Country Club was one of four Omaha, Neb.-area golf courses struck by ELF in the summer of 2001. The group's members also dug up those courses' greens and sprayed-painted buildings and walks. Before the incidents, TenEyck had never heard of ELF, and he couldn't understand why the group's members attacked a course like Pines, which is located in rural Nebraska.

If anything, ELF's Nebraska attacks prove that no golf course is safe from the threat of eco-terrorism. It proves that such violence doesn't just occur in heavily populated areas or golf meccas such as Florida. It can happen anywhere.

An important question arises from the Nebraska attacks. Is the golf industry — from superintendents to seed scientists — taking the threat of eco-terrorism seriously? If not, should industry personnel be more concerned

about the dangers posed by special-interest groups such as ELF? And what can golf courses do, if anything, to stop the threat?

Barry Clausen, a Redding, Calif.-based expert on eco-terrorism and author of two books on the subject, says groups like ELF have stepped up their attacks on golf courses in the past few years. "They view golf courses as infringing on Mother Earth," he says.

Clausen, who says there are eco-terrorist groups in every state, can't give an exact number of attacks on golf courses in the past few years, but he says there have been many. He says some courses don't report the attacks because they don't want to publicize them. He also says some victimized golf courses might not realize that eco-terrorist groups did the damage.

It's not just golf courses that the extremist groups are targeting. In June 2000, a group named the Anarchist Golfing Association (AGA) struck Turf-Seed's testing research farm in Hubbard, Ore., and caused nearly \$500,000 worth of damage. AGA attacked Turf-Seed because it believed the seed company was growing genetically engineered grass. In May 2001, ELF torched the University of

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture because it claimed a UW geneticist was "unleashing mutant genes into the environment that cause irreversible harm to forest ecosystems."

How much of a threat?

When members of the AGA struck Turf-Seed, its members stormed across 70 acres of the company's property and inflicted damage. They destroyed grasses that were being developed for salt and drought tolerance, and damaged two greenhouses. They also defaced property with graffiti.

Eerily, the group left behind golf balls with the initials AGA on them, and small figurines

of golfers. "It was very hateful," says Crystal Rose-Fricker, Turf-Seed's president, of the attack.

Having had a business that was a victim of an eco-terrorist group, Rose-Fricker says it's easy to think that the golf industry should take the radical groups and their threats more seriously.

But superintendents are not overly concerned about eco-terrorist groups, according to a recent *Golfdom* survey of 159 professionals. Only about 7 percent say they are "definitely concerned" about eco-terrorism on their golf courses, and about 21 percent say they are "mildly concerned."

Seventy-two percent of superintendents say they haven't given the threat of eco-terrorism much thought.

That's understandable. After all, superintendents have enough to worry about when it comes to maintaining their courses and keeping players content.

"Should we be concerned? Yes," says Tim Hiers, certified superintendent of The Old Collier Golf Club in Naples, Fla. "Should it be at the top of our concern list? Probably not."

One thing is for sure: The tragic events of Sept. 11 made people in the golf industry realize that no one is immune from terrorism, even if it's inflicted by domestic special-interest groups.

"Since Sept. 11, more people are aware of it," Rose-Fricker says. "They talk about it more and realize that it can happen."

Tony Lasher, certified superintendent of The Resort at the Mountain in Welches, Ore., lives in an area where environmental groups are common and concerned about the effects of golf course maintenance on the land and water. While most of the groups aren't radical, Lasher believes there's still a threat of eco-terrorism.

"The industry is changing, and we have to be careful of these groups," Lasher says. "Things are probably going to get a lot worse before they get better."

Jeff Bollig, communications director for the GCSAA, says the association has presented a few education sessions on eco-terrorism and offers an information pack to superintendents on the subject.

"Eco-terrorism is not top of mind with our members," Bollig says. "But our members know their golf courses can be targets of vandalism and destruction, and that the destruc-

Continued on page 32

The Earth Liberation Front left its mark on this snack shop located on the Pines Country Club.



COURTESY OF THE PINES COUNTRY CLUB

ELF at a Glance

The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is one of the nation's most notorious eco-terrorist groups. ELF has no official leadership and membership. Individuals who are part of ELF operate by themselves or in cells. ELF brags that it has carried out terrorist acts resulting in \$100 million in damages.

The group's guidelines are:

- To inflict economic damage on those profiting from the destruction and exploitation of the natural environment.
- To reveal and educate the public on the atrocities committed against the earth and all species that populate it.
- To take all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human and nonhuman.

Continued from page 30

tion could come from anyone — from thrill seekers to people who are anti-golf or anti-golf course management.”

With an increased focus on biotechnology in the industry, some wonder if such inventions as genetically engineered turf will persuade eco-terrorists to increase their attacks on the golf industry. Bayer CropScience, parent company of Bayer Environmental Science, recently said it sees the greatest opportunity for growth in the plant biotechnology segment. The Scotts Co. has many superintendents talking about the potential of its new Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, a genetically engineered turf that's resistant to Roundup.

Lisa Dry, communications director for the Biotech Industry Organization, a trade association in Washington, D.C., says it's unlikely that increased use of biotechnology in the golf industry will spur more attacks because eco-terrorists have already made up their minds that they dislike golf and turf anyway. “I can't imagine it would have any impact on increasing their lack of support [for the industry],” she says.

Anarchists or ecologists?

Just who are the people in eco-terrorist groups? Would they go so far as to torch a maintenance facility on a golf course? Would they care if people were inside a maintenance facility when they torched it?

The people who wrecked Pines Country Club and the other Nebraska courses were col-

lege students. The students, who were arrested by police shortly after committing their crimes, said they learned about ELF from the Internet. That's typical for such groups, which are loosely organized and secretive.

“I don't understand what the group's viewpoint is,” TenEyck says of ELF. “Because if its members are protecting the environment, why are they tearing up grass and using spray paint? I find it hard to believe they're environmentalists.”

Eco-terrorists have been described as “deep ecologists” who have a reverence for nature that is spiritual. They claim they're not violent and wouldn't kill anyone. But law officials fear it's only a matter of time before the groups do commit murder, intended or not, through their destructive acts. (ELF contacted through its Web site, would not comment for this story.)

Clausen says the typical profile of an eco-terrorist is a young person in his or her 20s who has had family problems or drug problems and is a social misfit. “They're anarchists, and they want to stop industrialized technology,” he adds.

Newer group members are often brainwashed by veteran members, says Clausen, who spent a year as an infiltrator with the eco-terrorist group Earth First! and penned the book, *Walking on the Edge*, to detail his experience.

The danger presented by eco-terrorists should not be underestimated. On its Web site, ELF takes pride in its acts of destruction. Members of the group, formed in England in the early 1990s, claimed responsibility for the \$50 million fire that destroyed an unfinished five-story condominium complex last summer in San Diego.

“There is such a thing as good and evil, and these people are evil,” Hiers says. “Tell me how you distinguish between them and the terrorists that do other things? They're not exactly the same, but they're close to being from the same page.”

Interestingly, the eco-terrorists loathe the comparison to international terrorists, such as members of Al Qaeda, Clausen says. In fact, domestic eco-terrorism declined after Sept. 11, Clausen adds, because ELF and other groups did not want to share headlines with international terrorists.

Continued on page 34



“The industry is changing, and we have to be careful of these groups.”

TONY LASHER,
SUPERINTENDENT
THE RESORT AT THE MOUNTAIN
WELCHES, ORE.

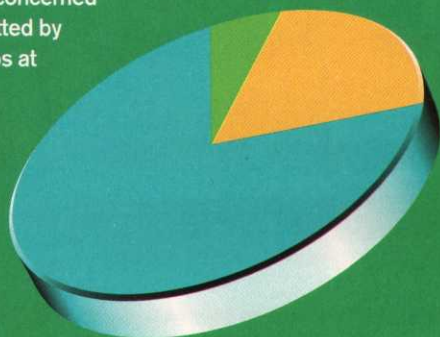
Uneasy About Eco-Terrorism?

In a recent online survey, *Golfdom* asked superintendents if they are concerned about eco-terrorism committed by radical environmental groups at their golf courses?

7%
Definitely concerned

21%
Mildly concerned

72%
Haven't given it much thought



* BASED ON 159 RESPONSES

Golfdom

Continued from page 32

Fueled by emotion

Why not simply educate the eco-terrorists that golf is not in the business of profiting from the destruction and exploitation of the natural environment? And why not enlighten the eco-terrorists that many superintendents are environmentally sound in their approaches to golf course maintenance?

That would be fine ... if the eco-terrorists would listen.

Superintendents and others would like to educate the groups, but they believe the groups' views are so entrenched that they can't be changed. They're difficult to educate because their beliefs are fueled by emotion, Lasher says.

After Turf-Seed was hit by the AGA, Rose-Fricker says she responded to an e-mail from the group — a message insisting that grass was an invasive weed and taking over the planet — and offered to explain the benefits of grass as well as the role of Turf-Seed to make grass even better for the environment.

"We asked them to come in and meet with us so we could explain what we were doing and educate them about the research we were doing," Rose-Fricker says. "We told them we wouldn't press any charges. Of course, they didn't respond."

Still, Rose-Fricker contends it's important for the golf industry to market and promote the value of grass — that is important to con-

trol erosion, that it gives off oxygen, that it provides food to animals — to help educate all environmental groups that the golf industry is not the ecological foe they think.

"A lot of people don't realize how valuable grass is to the environment," Rose-Fricker says, adding that some special-interest groups believe that grass is only a chemical dumping ground.

One reason that eco-terrorists are anti-golf is because they view the game as a rich person's game. The golf industry has battled that stereotype for years.

If eco-terrorists did their homework, they would realize that golf is not just for the wealthy, TenEyck and Hiers say. Both point out that the number of public golf courses (11,501, according to a recent National Golf Foundation report) far outweighs the number of private clubs (4,326, according to NGF). TenEyck and Hiers contend that golf is a game for the masses.

"[Eco-terrorists] should do a little more research before they start destroying other people's property," TenEyck says.

Hiers also points out that golf events raise millions of dollars for environmental causes. But Hiers is convinced that eco-terrorists don't want to hear anything good about golf.

"I don't think we should waste one calorie of time on these people because the facts don't matter to them," he says.

Continued on page 36

If anything, ELF's attack on four Nebraska golf courses, including the Pines Country Club pictured below, prove that no course is safe from the threat of eco-terrorism.



COURTESY OF THE PINES COUNTRY CLUB

Continued from page 34

Says Clausen: "They're anarchists. It doesn't matter what you say or do. It's not going to change their minds."

Measures can be taken to prevent possible attacks or to maintain the damage that could come from attacks. It's simply a matter of going on the defensive and taking precautions to protect assets. For example, Turf-Seed has strengthened security around its facility since it was attacked with more fencing, motion sensors, cameras and lights, Rose-Fricker says.

That doesn't mean that golf courses need to build 15-foot walls or barbed-wire fences around their properties to keep terrorists out, Bollig says. It does mean that superintendents and others should be diligent in their management approach, he adds. That means properly securing chemicals and keeping equipment stored in areas that are safe from potential vandalism.

If courses can afford it, they might hire security guards to oversee their properties at

night. But Clausen says courses should hire experienced professionals, not Barney Fife-types who don't know what they're doing.

Clausen also says superintendents and their crew members should be more aware of what's going on around them, especially occurrences that are out of the ordinary.

"Make sure employees carry something as trivial as pencils and note pads with them," Clausen says. "So if someone sees a vehicle that looks suspicious . . . he can write down the vehicle's license plate number just in case."

The Pines Country Club had been vandalized before the ELF attack — kids stealing golf cars and riding them on greens — but the damage was minimal in comparison. TenEyck believes kids will vandalize the course before it's ever defaced by eco-terrorists again.

But he won't consider ELF's attack on the Pines an aberration.

"I can't say that this happening again is not in the back of my mind," he says. ■

It wasn't eco-terrorism, but Ron Furlong, superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Bellingham, Wash., recalls the night his course was vandalized by teenagers. See "A Close Encounter With Vandalism" on page 38.

The FBI and Eco-Terrorism

Editor's note: In February 2002, James F. Jarboe, the domestic terrorism section chief for the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, testified before the House Resources Committee Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health on the threat of eco-terrorism. Here are excerpts from his testimony:

The FBI divides the terrorist threat facing the United States into two broad categories, international and domestic. International terrorism involves violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any state, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or any state. Domestic terrorism is the unlawful use, or threatened use, of violence by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States (or its territories) without foreign direction, committed against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

During the past decade we have witnessed dramatic changes in the nature of the terrorist threat. In the 1990s, right-wing extremism overtook left-wing terror-

ism as the most dangerous domestic terrorist threat to the country. During the past several years, special-interest extremism, as characterized by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), has emerged as a serious terrorist threat. Generally, extremist groups engage in much activity that is protected by constitutional guarantees of free speech and assembly. Law enforcement becomes involved when the volatile talk of these groups transgresses into unlawful action. The FBI estimates that the ALF/ELF have committed more than 600 criminal acts in the United States since 1996, resulting in damages in excess of \$43 million.

Special-interest terrorism differs from traditional right-wing and left-wing terrorism in that extremist special interest groups seek to resolve specific issues, rather than effect widespread political change. Special-interest extremists continue to conduct acts of politically motivated violence to force segments of society, including the

general public, to change attitudes about issues considered important to their causes. These groups occupy the extreme fringes of animal rights, pro-life, environmental, anti-nuclear, and other movements. Some special-interest extremists — most notably within the animal rights and environmental movements — have turned increasingly toward vandalism and terrorist activity in attempts to further their causes.

The ELF advocates "monkeywrenching," a euphemism for acts of sabotage and property destruction against industries and other entities perceived to be damaging to the natural environment. "Monkeywrenching" includes tree spiking, arson, sabotage of logging or construction equipment, and other types of property destruction.

The FBI has developed a strong response to the threats posed by domestic and international terrorism. Between fiscal years 1993 and 2003, the number of special agents dedicated to the FBI's counterterrorism programs grew by about 224 percent to 1,669 — nearly 16 percent of all FBI special agents. The FBI and our law enforcement partners have made a number of arrests of individuals alleged to have perpetrated acts of eco-terrorism. Several of these individuals have been successfully prosecuted.

A Close Encounter With Vandalism

Superintendent recalls distressing night

BY RON FURLONG

On a cool summer's night in northern Washington not long ago, I was dreaming happily about such topics as great horned owls, my compost pile, fairway discoloration, the inability to double verticut 29 greens in one day, gasoline prices and why the Minnesota Timberwolves can't get past the first round. Just as Kevin Garnett was dunking over Tim Duncan's outstretched hands, the phone rang. It was 3:15 a.m.

Now, it's never good to get a phone call at 3:15 a.m. If you won the lottery, they aren't going to call you to tell you at 3:15 a.m. If you got a raise, your boss is not going to call at 3:15 a.m. If you're cholesterol level finally dropped into the normal range, your

doctor is not going to call you at 3:15 a.m.

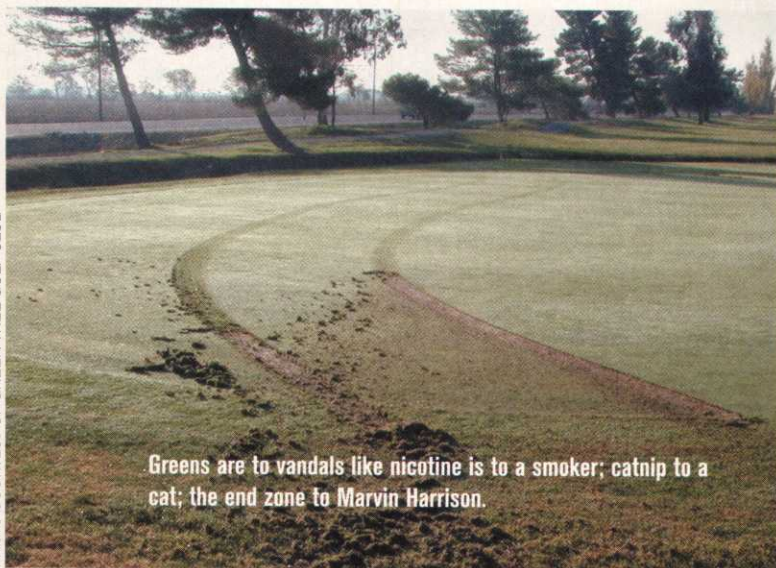
As I raced for the phone in an attempt to prevent the waking of my wife and daughter, the terrible thoughts one gets at 3:15 in the morning when the phone rings were racing through my head. You start actually hoping for the lesser of evils. You know it's going to be something bad, but maybe it's only something just a little bad and not really bad. I kicked over a Bob the Builder toy as I went for the phone. "Can we fix it?" Bob asked me in his tiny toy voice from the floor. "I hope so," I whispered to Bob as I reached for the phone.

I didn't get to the phone in time. It stopped ringing. I waited a few moments and then checked the message. The voice on the other end of the phone was cold and direct, something quite out of the ordinary for this particular voice. "Ron, we've got vandals at the course. You better get in here."

It was the golf pro at my course. I had never heard him so implacable. I got ready for work in a sort of trance, my mind racing at the possibilities of what the phone call could mean; none of the possibilities were pleasant. I put deodorant under only my left arm and shaved only my right cheek. My socks didn't match and I dressed for January instead of June, inexplicably putting layers of sweaters and coats on like I was going for a hike in the Yukon.

As I began my normally 22-minute drive to work, I began to disrobe, throwing off coats and sweaters in earnest as I drove haphazardly down the winding road near my house. I

Continued on page 40



Greens are to vandals like nicotine is to a smoker; catnip to a cat; the end zone to Marvin Harrison.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREEN TREE GOLF CLUB

Part of dealing with vandalism is dealing with the question of who would do such a thing and why.

Continued from page 38

almost turned north instead of south, catching myself at the last moment. The words of the golf pro kept echoing in my head: "We've got vandals at the course. You better get in here."

I've heard the horror stories, as we all have. Roundup on the greens. Maintenance building torched. What could they be doing, I wondered? "We've got vandals on the course." My God, were they still there? Was I going to be involved in a hunt through the trees and bushes for the culprits? Did we have them cornered, and I was being called in as a backup?

The first leg of my drive to work I normally do in eight to 10 minutes. This time I did it in six. As I drove my thoughts kept going back to one thing: the greens. Nothing else, I suddenly realized as I drove, mattered nearly as much. Donuts in the fairways I could deal with. A little bunker edge repair we could handle. A few golf cars in ponds we could pull out. But the greens. . . . Oh, I hoped they stayed off the precious "pads."

They didn't of course. How could they? Greens are to vandals like nicotine is to a smoker; catnip to a cat; the end zone to Marvin Harrison. They are too appealing. Too tempting. Too wonderful to pass up.

The first thing I heard as I pulled into the course (a record drive time of 17 minutes) was that the vandals had stolen golf cars and driven all over the course, including on all of the greens. We have 27 holes and two putting greens. I was also informed they had been caught. There were seven teenagers. Two of them were so drunk they were found passed out on the course. Although the course is secluded with no homes around it, a neighbor at a nearby farm had heard them and called the police. Encountering our locked gate, an officer had hiked up the long entrance road and surprised them, nabbing all seven.

Inspection of the course found about 15 stolen golf cars, which they used for joy riding. Several of the cars were in ditches or ponds. The damage to the course was limited to the greens and a couple of bunkers. The greens damage was superficial. They had done the classic "donuts" on every green, some worse than others. However, the firmness of the greens saved us. Had this been during the rains of winter, the damage would have been severe.

After a soluble fertilizer application, we were

grown out of any visible damage in two days. The bunker repair took about four hours. Nothing major. We were lucky.

My brush with vandalism left me wondering what some other superintendents have had to deal with in this area. As I made a few inquiries, I heard tales ranging from a fired employee trying to set a diesel tank on fire (how you can try to set a gas tank on fire and not succeed is beyond me) to another fired employee poisoning a pond and killing some geese and fish.

Thomas J. Fiegel, superintendent at Niagara Frontier Country Club in Youngstown, N.Y., deals with vandalism on an almost regular basis. "My employees don't even like to tell me anymore, I get so upset," he says. "When I see damage, I need to get away and be myself for awhile."

Part of dealing with vandalism is dealing with the question of who would do such a thing and why. Perhaps one can almost understand a vengeful past employee or simply someone that has a personal grudge against you. But understanding the mindset of an individual or group that deliberately sets out to destroy property simply because it is there is difficult at best.

Dan Evers, superintendent at Compass Pointe Golf Course in Pasadena, Md., sent me some frightening pictures from an incident that occurred last August. A kid in a jeep tore up three holes and completely destroyed one green. Evers said they caught him, and a court date was scheduled. The picture he sent of what used to be a green was enough to scare the living daylights out of any superintendent.

So, you may ask, did I learn any valuable lessons from my experience or from the stories of others? Not really. But I do know that vandalism is going to occur at some level to almost every single one of us at one time or another. You can do your best to protect your course (fences, gates, hourly police patrols, motion lights, neighborhood watch,) but you're still going to get bitten at some point.

The only advice I can offer is don't answer the phone at 3:15 in the morning. Let it ring, go back to sleep and keep dreaming of those great horned owls. ■

Furlong, superintendent Avalon Golf Club in Bellingham, Wash., can be reached at rf7500@aol.com.