



Don't **Pinch** Your Pennies

When it comes to irrigation maintenance, you can't afford to skimp on parts

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Remember that old motor oil commercial? It shows a battered jalopy huffing down the street and puffing thick, black smoke from its exhaust. Then the driver of the car has the audacity to say, "Motor oil is motor oil."

You'll never catch Curt Leming, superintendent of Glendale Lakes Golf Course in

Geneva, Ill., making such an inane statement about oil. Leming knows the good Texas tea from the bad. The same holds true for repair parts associated with irrigation system maintenance.

Leming has been in the business for 30 years. One thing he has learned is not to go the cheap route when it comes to irrigation system maintenance. Even if you're on a tight

Continued on page 45

Don't Pinch Your Pennies

Continued from page 42

budget, don't cut corners because you'll end up paying for those decisions eventually. It's worth it to spend more now on better parts now, Leming stresses.

"There are components throughout an irrigation system where you have the option to purchase cheaper parts," Leming says. "Invariably they don't last, and you end up spending a lot on labor to replace them."

Over the past few years, the irrigation system at O'Bannon Creek Golf Club in Loveland, Ohio, has been updated gradually with modern parts and equipment. "[The upgrade] will double our capacity from what we had before," Guynan says proudly.

Like Leming, Guynan warns superintendents to never do irrigation maintenance on the cheap. Guynan didn't skimp when it came to purchasing such items as new intakes and heads. "Everything we've done, we've tried to do with the best materials," he says.

What, for instance, is going the cheap route? Leming warns superintendents not to use 3-inch PVC tees to connect irrigation pipes. "They crack and split open, and you have to replace them," he says of PVC, a type of plastic.

When he joined Glendale, Leming inherited an irrigation system laced with 3-inch PVC tees throughout its piping. He's had to replace about 60 of them. Leming has replaced the PVC tees with steel tees, which were the standard in the 1980s, he says. They may cost two or three times the amount of PVC tees, but they're worth it, he adds.

Keep in mind that a golf course irrigation system requires stronger parts because it functions with much higher water pressure and causes pipes to expand and contract more than most residential irrigation systems, Leming points out.

Regarding pipe, make sure the pipe

To understand the ins and outs of your irrigation system is to be an expert in water management. See the related story, **Water Works**, on page 38.

Time for a Change?

Brian Vinchesi, president of Irrigation Consulting in Peperell, Mass., provides the following guidelines for the average lifespan of golf course irrigation parts:

PART	LIFESPAN (IN YEARS)
Irrigation Head	15 to 18
Gate Valves	15 to 20
Pumps	20 to 25
Pipe	30
Controllers	10 to 15
Computer Hardware	3 to 5
Computer Software	1 to 3
Wire Connections	25

you purchase measures up to specifications. And if you don't install it yourself, make sure you have someone who's reputable do it for you. "If somebody is cutting corners, such as not gluing pipe properly, it can be a nightmare," Guynan says.

If you're not sure what you're doing when it comes to maintaining a certain irrigation system component, such as a pump station, don't hesitate to hire an outside expert to help.

"I find that the pump station has become so technical that it pays me to have somebody who works on them all the time to come in and diagnose what's wrong with it," Leming says. "It's money well spent."

Speaking of money, irrigation maintenance can cost a lot of it. So it behooves superintendents to research the components they plan to purchase. They could end up saving themselves some money.

Just ask Leming. The irrigation water at Glendale is very abrasive, and several

Continued on page 46

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GREGG GUYNAN, SUPERINTENDENT
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Continued from page 45

irrigation components, including the drives and nozzles on sprinklers, needed to be replaced. But Leming discovered that it was more economical to replace all of the sprinklers than just replace the drives and nozzles on them.

“When you’re buying in quantity, you can get a pretty decent price on sprinklers,” Leming points out, noting that he not only spent his money wisely but now has better quality and more modern sprinklers on his golf course.

Speaking of saving a few bucks, if you have experience doing the work that comes with irrigation maintenance, you might consider doing the work in-house.

“We’ve saved hundreds of thousands of dollars by doing the work in-house,” Guynan says. “And it’s not that hard to do. You just take your time and be careful.” ■

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