

I couldn't agree more with the golf course superintendents who charge that homeowners are the worst offenders when it comes to wasting potable water. Most homeowners are clueless about how to water their lawns properly. But apparently there are superintendents out there who are wasting potable water, too.

How do I know? Because those superintendents admit it.

Late last year we conducted an online poll of 380 superintendents to find out how they manage water use on their golf courses. We asked them: Are you managing water use as efficiently as possible? Twenty-five percent of superintendents answered, "Yes, our course is golden brown in some areas." Sixty-five percent answered, "Somewhat, we're trying to find the right balance."

But 9 percent answered, "No, we're watering away to attain as thick and green of turf as possible."

Now, I understand that some of the superintendents in this 9 percent are irrigating with effluent water. But not all of them. Heck, even if it's only half of the 9 percent that use potable water to achieve the thick, green look . . . well . . . that's still too many superintendents who are watering away like homeowners.

Consider that golf courses in many parts of the country are under "CSI"-like scrutiny for their watering habits by the general public, including homeowners. But however misdirected the general public is for assuming that most golf courses use too much water, its watchdogs can sniff out the few courses that do and bring them to light — as in the media spotlight.

And let's not forget the mainstream media loves to haul out the dirty laundry. When there's a story of such — "Golf Course Defies City's Plan for Water Conservation" — it's quite possible the six o'clock news will set up in front of the clubhouse for a live broadcast. Hence, the entire golf industry ends up looking irresponsible on the broadcast — including, unfairly, the 90 percent of superintendents who are watering responsibly.

In essence, the few-bad-apples theory applies

Time to Water Down This Label

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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here. But to be fair, most of these bad-apple superintendents shouldn't be classified in the reckless context that the connotation implies. The bet here is the few superintendents who are watering away are doing so because they have to — or they'll be scanning the Sunday classifieds for another job. The reality is that many members who pay thousands of dollars a year to play at their private clubs expect to see a return on that money in the form of thick, green turf — every day.

So what can brown turf do for the superintendents at these clubs? Get them fired. So, yes, these superintendents are scared to scale back on irrigation.

So what's the industry to do about golf course maintenance's version of Watergate? I hate to put the onus on the 90 percent of superintendents who irrigate responsibly, but that's what I'm going to do. It's time for them to stand up and tell their stories.

Maybe this means these superintendents should make presentations about their irrigation tendencies at city council meetings to get the word out that they're not wasting water. Maybe it means they should invite the press to their courses to show them how watchful they are not to over-irrigate for the sake of their communities and the environment. (Take it from me, the press likes "good" stories, too.)

Somehow and some way, these responsible superintendents must step forward and dispute the public's assumption that *all* golf courses waste water. They must quash this label created by the minority.

So, if you're one of the superintendents in the 90 percentile, what do you plan to do?

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