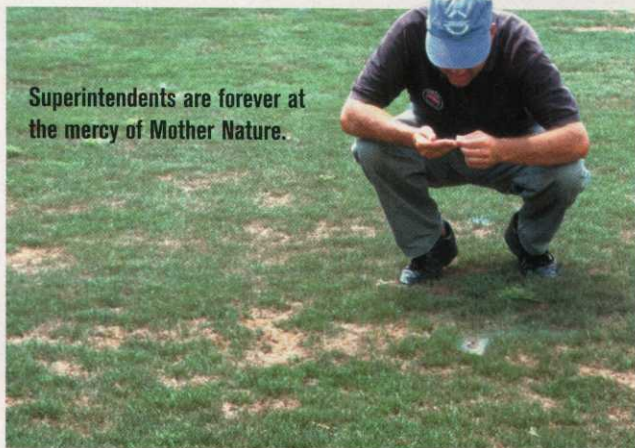


Off The Fringe

Death, Taxes and Turf Loss

YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE FIRST TWO,
BUT YOU CAN THE THIRD



Superintendents are forever at the mercy of Mother Nature.

By Charlie Fultz, Contributing Editor

A friend of mine, a superintendent who had been in the business for more than 20 years, once told me, "It's not *if* you'll ever lose turf, but *when*." He followed that quote with, "But you know the good superintendents are the ones who recover quickly and never miss a beat."

What does a superintendent do to prepare for such an unknown disaster? And when it strikes, be it a disease-ridden green or fairway, how does one handle the situation and shine in spite of it?

For one, superintendents are forever at the mercy of Mother Nature. Even on their best days, superintendents hope to break even with the person in charge. With that in mind, is it possible to prepare for the unknown? Yes, with a few important pieces of information from your own course.

For starters, turf loss, whether in the spring, summer, fall or winter, has some key factors associated with it — factors that can be avoided. Lack of air movement, limited sunlight and poor drainage are just a few of the factors that can be reversed before a disaster strikes.

If trees lead to lack of air movement and limit sunlight, then selective pruning or removal should be considered. Fans are also a great way to create air movement.

Quotable

"The kid you yelled at at the pool last year is maybe your president 10 years later."

— Chris Borders, general manager of the Atlanta Athletic Club, on how things sometimes turn out in this crazy business. So you'd better be careful of who you holler at for doing cannon balls off the diving board.

"Bob, you get around a lot. ... I mean that in an agronomic sense."

— John Street, an Ohio State University turfgrass specialist, acknowledging the field experience of the United States Golf Association Green Section's North-Central Region Director Bob Brame before asking him a question at a recent turf conference.

"I appreciate the clarification."

— a humored Brame, responding to Street with a deadpan quip.

"I wish I could tell you a really neat story to go along with [how we came up with the name] ... the Father, Son and Holy Ghost or something."

— Toni Bucci, business manager for BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals, on how BASF came up with the name for its new fungicide, Trinity.

In the case of excessive water, gravel-only drainage, slit drains or standard 4-inch corrugated drain installs can be ways to eliminate major problems before they arrive. But if disasters do occur, superintendents can still shine. How do they demonstrate the professional attributes that make them valuable managers?

Communication is vital at this point. They must make sure that people in charge (owner, general manager, greens

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committee) understand what has happened and what effect it will have on the golf course.

The golfers should also be aware of what's going on. Keep in mind that arming them with the proper information is a lot better than allowing them to form their own opinions and foster inaccuracies.

It's also important to write a recovery plan, including the cost to remedy the situation. In the plan, state what has happened, how it happened (if known), the steps necessary to remedy it, and how long this particular area will be out of play while it heals. Be realistic when writing the plan; don't sugarcoat anything. If possible, bring in another superintendent or professional colleague to get their views as well.

Also, take photographs of what happened. Note any limiting factors associated with the problem. Were there tree or sunlight issues you weren't allowed to address that accentuated this problem? If so, photograph them to help provide an explanation.

With all of this in mind, a plan and a proactive approach are only good if both are implemented. It's also time for a superintendent to prove his or her worth. Few things are more impressive than overcoming adversity in the face of unforeseen obstacles.

Once recovered, use the time after to self-reflect. Did the damaged area recover as you expected? If not, why? What could you have done differently to make this recover quicker, if possible? Ask yourself how you can prevent it from happening again in the future?

The soul searching will make you smarter and wiser. And a successful recovery also cements in the supervisor's mind that his or her superintendent can handle challenges and persevere. ■

Fultz is superintendent of the Shenvallee (Va.) Golf Resort and a frequent contributor to Golfdom.

How to Retain the Best Employees

For many golf course superintendents, finding and retaining reliable employees is a bigger professional concern than their own job security. The turnover rate among golf course maintenance workers, who often leave for better-paying and less-demanding jobs, is high and has been a continuing problem at public and private courses alike. But it's a problem that can be addressed on several fronts.

For starters, superintendents might want to begin paying maintenance workers a higher wage to retain them. A higher wage could be as little as one more dollar an hour. Superintendents should also keep in mind that turnover costs them more money in the long run to retrain new employees, which may make a pay increase even more sensible. Also, a constant influx of inexperienced employees could have a negative impact on course conditioning.

Hence, boosting workers' wages can provide them with more satisfaction and motivation. Superintendents benefit by having harder-working and more reliable workers, which translates into less turnover.

While money can help superintendents retain employees, it's not the only alternative. It's also vital to empower employees and let them know they are valued. If you're a good boss — someone who cares about his or her employees, empowers them to do their jobs and provides them the opportunity to grow — there's a good chance your employees will want to stay with you, even if they have opportunities to leave for more lucrative jobs.

The "Tip of the Month" is provided by Syngenta to support superintendents in their agronomic, business and professional development. To comment on this column, submit a lesson from your own experience, or suggest a topic to be covered in a future issue, please visit www.golfbusinesstips.com.



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