



In Their Own Words: Why Superintendents Use **Water** Wisely

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Joe Homeowner, the guy who irrigates the concrete sidewalk along with his lawn, doesn't hesitate to point his finger at golf courses for wasting water. But golf course superintendents say Joe Homeowner should point his finger at himself.

"I can't tell you how many times I drive by people's residences and their sprinklers are running while it's pouring down rain," says Chuck Green, director of golf course operations for Sage Valley Country Club in Graniteville, S.C.

Green, on the other hand, turns off his irrigation system when he sees the dark clouds coming. And he says he keeps it off until his course's turfgrass needs a drink.

"Superintendents are one of the most responsible groups around when it comes to water consumption," Green contends.

Many superintendents, Green included, resent being labeled as water wasters by golfers and non-golfers alike. Most superintendents agree that the majority of their brethren are responsible irrigators. Sure, there are some superintendents who admit to watering away to achieve the greenest and lushest

turfgrass possible. But most superintendents say there are too many reasons to apply water responsibly, from doing the right thing economically to doing the right thing environmentally.

"I believe superintendents overall are diligent about being good stewards when it comes to water use," says Mark Jarrell, the certified golf course superintendent for Palm Beach National Golf

and Country Club in Lake Worth, Fla. "Why wouldn't they be?"

Jarrell quickly answers his own question with a list of reasons why superintendents do not over-water:

- They don't want to create disease problems.
- They don't want to waste money — from the cost of the water itself to the cost of the power used to irrigate.
- They don't want to attract bad press.

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"It's just not in any superintendent's best interest to waste water," Jarrell says.

Joe Hubbard, director of golf course maintenance for the Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, Fla., says golf courses are easy to pick on because they are so visible.

"[Golf courses] take up such a large area," he says.

And golf course irrigation heads are more widespread, which give people the perception they use a lot more water.

But what those blamers don't understand is that those irrigation heads are running on 20-minute cycles, Hubbard says. And they don't realize that the courses with the big irrigation heads might not be watering with fresh

water at all. If it's in Florida or Arizona, there's a good chance it's effluent water. "People blame golf courses all the time," Hubbard says. "But they just don't get it."

Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy at the six-course Desert Mountain Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., says some superintendents are under pressure from their members and their employers to use more water to green up courses because "green sells."

"But most superintendents want to use less water," Emerson adds. "Agronomically, using less water is better."

Longtime superintendent Cal Roth, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, says most superintendents realize that too much water causes poor play-

ing conditions. "I think everybody in the business who's striving to produce quality playing conditions is going to work to keep the amount of water they put on the golf course to a minimum," Roth says.

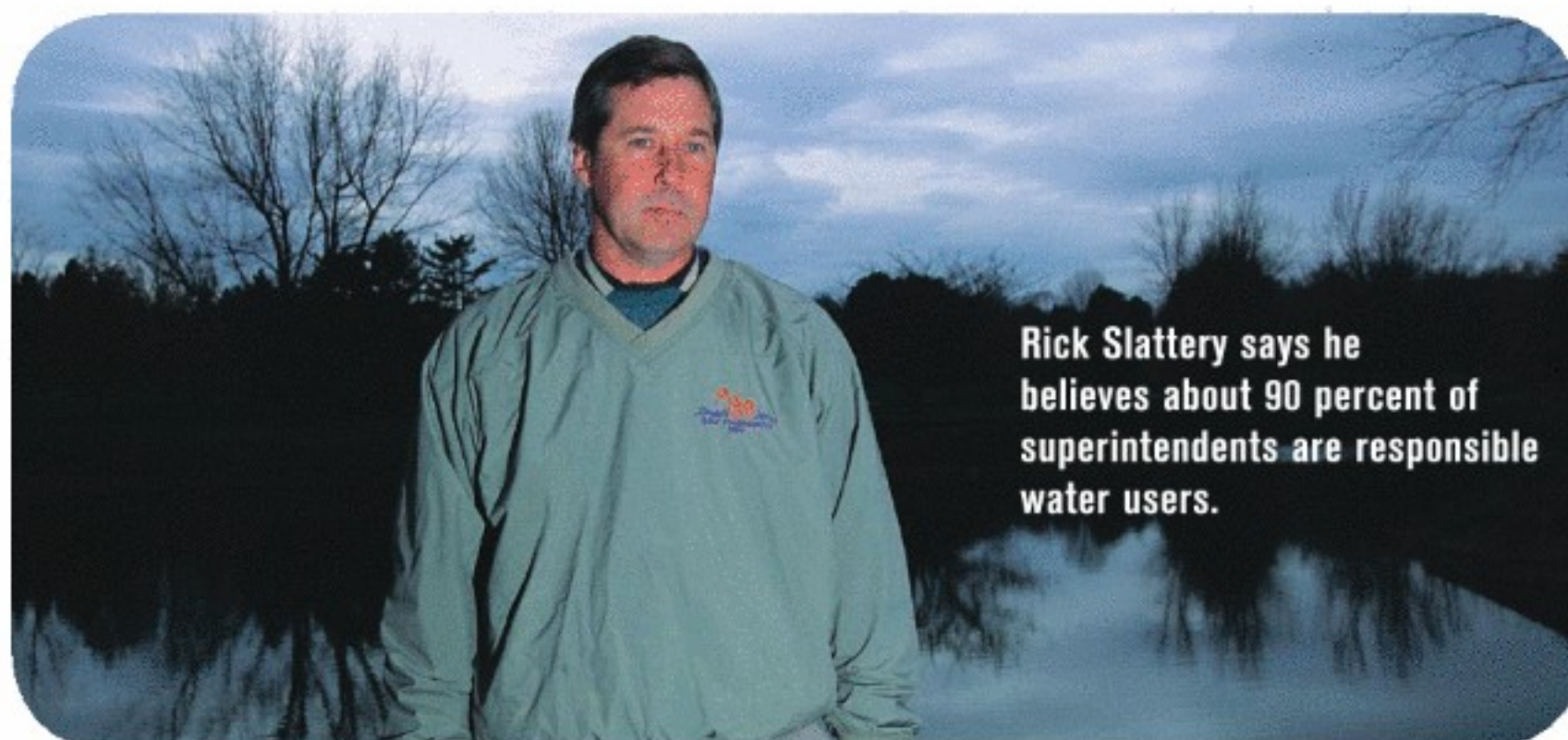
Case in point: At Sage Valley, Green says his maintenance staff hand waters areas so they don't waste water. "We're just not pushing buttons and letting the sprinklers run," he adds.

Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club in Fairport, N.Y., says he believes about 90 percent of superintendents are responsible water users. The other 10 percent are under pressure to over water from members or golfers or they are just inexperienced about irrigation, Slattery adds.

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Greg Lyman, director of environmental programs for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, says statistics prove that most superintendents are efficient irrigators.

According to "Golf Course Water Use and Conservation Study," a recent study conducted by the GCSAA, golf courses use about 1.5 percent of fresh water used nationally for irrigation. Golf courses

use 0.5 percent of total fresh water.

Lyman cites the increased cost of water, especially in the West and Southeast, as good reasons for superintendents to use as little as they can. "It behooves those superintendents to be careful with the resource because it's just good business," he adds.

It troubles Jarrell that the critics don't realize that the almost 1,500 golf courses in Florida use only about 3 percent of the state's fresh water. On top of that, Jarrell says much of the water put on the golf course makes its way back into ponds and ground water. Yet, golf courses continually face water restrictions in south Florida.

"I'm collecting water that's being filtered and cleaned," Jarrell says. "I'm part of the solution." ■

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