



Continued from page 57

ably not going to find yourself in a very good position after the rules and policies are set," Williams says. "We need people in our associations and our industry as well as volunteers to be involved in the decision-making and policy-making."

Those people should come to meetings armed with sound science to prove the golf industry is doing its part to irrigate responsibly, Williams says. They need to point out that golf uses its share of water as part of a viable economic industry. And they need to tout superintendents as irrigation experts who use the most precise equipment in the world to water their golf courses, Williams says.

"The public is often uninformed, and people think golf courses are generally just a water abuser," Williams adds. "But once they're apprised to how [golf courses use water], they realize that we're part of the solution rather than a big part of the problem."

Mark Esoda will attest to that. The certified superintendent for the Atlanta (Ga.) Country Club spearheaded an effort by the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association to enact Best Management Practices for irrigation, a move that has benefited the golf industry's image statewide. The Georgia GCSA involved the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GEPD) in the project, and their relationship has blossomed into one of respect.

Esoda and the Georgia GCSA continue to take their message to the public. Esoda says the Georgia GCSA is telling its story to water councils, environmentalists and the general public. Esoda hopes more chapter associations go on the education and public relations fronts.

"I'm really optimistic that if we walk the talk and stand up for ourselves, we will be well respected in 2025," Esoda says. ■

Lead or Be Left Behind

In the next 15 years, our industry will face enormous pressure to regulate the amount of water used on golf courses. How will you react?

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR., CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I love working at a public golf course. There is no other place on earth you can witness such a diversity of people.

In July, a golfer came to my course, and I can't get him out of my head. The most noticeable feature was his hair, which was a 1980s-style mullet. He was also wearing spandex running shorts with his collared golf shirt. I only wish I had a camera to take a photo of him.

When I saw him practicing on the putting green, I stared at him for a few seconds and then smiled. I thought if he thought his distinctive look made him happy, then so be it. He's not hurting anyone. But the bottom line is the mullet man had found his comfort zone, and he wasn't willing to leave it.

While I can enjoy this type of behavior with fashion statements, I be-

come concerned when it shows up in our industry. I believe that if you think you have hit the perfect place with both your golf course and career and intend to simply continue to do what you have always done, you should retire and find something else to do. You're crazy if you don't think your industry is not changing around you.

This is especially true with water management. If you think you have learned all you can about water management, prepare yourself for a very rude awakening because things will change drastically in the coming years.

Environmentally, the future of golf course irrigation can be summarized with two words: quantity and quality. In the next 15 years, our industry will face enormous governmental pressure fueled by misinformed public opinion and hard-core environmental groups

to regulate the amount of water used on golf courses. Many industry experts agree that the quantity and the quality of water needed to sustain golf courses is the most important crisis facing our industry.

Golf courses use approximately 2.1 billion gallons of water per day (or 0.5 percent of the nation's total fresh water annually). At a time when there is increasing turmoil over access to fresh water, the general public will not tolerate such a huge amount of water use by an industry that they perceive to be a recreational activity rather than a business industry that contributes \$76 billion dollars to the economy each year. These looming regulatory restriction mandates will not only alter how golf courses are managed, but also completely change the face of our industry as a whole.

The public's growing concern over the diminishing availability of fresh drinking water will undoubtedly limit a golf course's ability to tap into fresh water as an irrigation source. Recycled water will become the main water supply for golf courses, and the only water supply in many circumstances. Those superintendents who lack the necessary skills to manage their golf courses with recycled water, because of a lack of knowledge or experience, will suddenly find themselves in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable employment situation.

One major setback we need to overcome is that many of us have never been educated and trained in the growing area of water issues. While attending college, technical schools or earning a turf certificate, we all were formally trained on the various types of fertilizers and pesticides, and how to calculate the amount of nutrients and active ingredients applied. Most of us also participated in internship programs where we learned more of the hands-on approach of managing

the golf course by mowing, spraying and irrigation repair. As assistants, we were taught to manage other people to accomplish the jobs necessary to prepare the golf course for daily play.

Throughout the process of learning how to become a successful golf course superintendent, becoming skilled in water management was geared more toward understanding how the irrigation system functioned and repairing leaky pilot valves than the subjects of irrigating with recycled water and learning conservation practices such as how to harvest rain water during storm events. In short, as an industry, many of us are woefully unprepared for the environmental challenges that lie ahead in the world of water management for golf courses.

These new impending restrictions and reductions in water quality will demand a better understanding of irrigation and support technology to help counterbal-

ance these new industry challenges.

For years, I've spoken with fellow superintendents who truly believe that all irrigation companies and their systems are the same — that each one simply throws water. That mentality has to change. Each irrigation company and the technology it represents with its products has its differences. It's easy to group them all in the category of water throwers, but much more difficult to understand their differences. But these technological differences are vitally important to our future success simply because every golf course poses unique challenges in which to utilize them. Every golf course is different, so every irrigation system is also going to be different. Making sure we understand all the technology available to us will give us the adaptability we'll need to survive in the next 20 years.

Continued on page 60



Christopher S. Gray Sr., the general manager and superintendent of the Marvel Golf Club, says his peers must prepare now for irrigation in 2025.



Continued from page 59

Selecting the right irrigation system and technology for your course will be the cornerstone of a successful future with irrigation practices. Some irrigation systems are more water and energy efficient than others, due in large parts to the overall design, the pumping station, the individual heads and regular maintenance practices. Since all water is pumped, the energy component of each unit of water must be considered. New systems should be evaluated and bought on a “life cost” basis, rather than the traditional initial cost of the system. It’s also imperative that these newer systems contain the technology to collect vast amounts of data of the irrigation system’s actual use on the

golf course. This is the valuable information needed for assessing not only how our individual golf courses are performing, but also how our industry is performing.

Philosophically, we need to make some serious changes. The way we operated our courses only a few years ago is not the same way we do it today. One reason is because we have learned through our continuing education to be better and more effective with our methods to manage our golf courses with fewer inputs. The other reason — and one that is much more difficult with which to deal — is the new challenges and restrictions that force us to completely re-examine the methods necessary to manage our golf facilities.

But this latter reason is one of our greatest strengths. As an industry, our constant ability to adapt and overcome difficult and, often times, unforeseen obstacles has proved one of our most defining attributes.

The time has come, yet again, for us to showcase this ability by rethinking our current water management practices for not only our golf course, but also for our entire industry.

As superintendents, we are the people who ultimately control the amount of water used on golf courses. Each day, we assess turf conditions, evaluate the impending weather conditions, take into account the time frames of fertilizer and pesticide applications and determine if irrigation is necessary and, if so, how

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long to set the cycles for the different areas of the course.

These decisions are most likely based on the underlying assumption that there will always be an adequate supply of available irrigation water, with very little to no consideration being given to the total amount of water that will be used for the entire growing season. Most of us have operated this way for years.

Unfortunately, we can no longer afford to manage our irrigation practices in this manner. We need to start budgeting our water use more like we budget our fertilizer and pesticide use. By forcing ourselves to examine the amount of water used on our courses on a daily, monthly and annual basis, we begin to change our outdated and

“ We need to start budgeting our water use more like we budget our fertilizer and pesticide use.

potentially dangerous mindset when it comes to water management.

When I interview people for assistant positions, I always tell them, “If you don’t like change, I suggest you leave the golf industry.” I will always believe this is true.

I can’t think of one superintendent who has survived any length of time being complacent and sitting on his or her laurels unwilling to embrace the constant changes of our industry.

You should be no different. The last thing I want for any of us is to suddenly realize that times have changed and we’ve been left behind wearing spandex running shorts and sporting timeworn mullets.

Lead or be left behind. It’s our call. ■

Gray, general manager and superintendent of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky., is a Golfdom contributing editor and editorial advisory board member. Gray was the 2008 recipient of Rain Bird’s Intelligent Use of Water Award.



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