

# A Call to Action

BY DEMIE MOORE

**L**et's face it, a lot of water is used on and around golf courses. So, in light of today's climate of concern over economic and environmental issues as well as growing concern about enough water for the future, it's not really surprising there's growing scrutiny of the water use on golf courses — by both supporters of the game and its detractors.

Regardless of whether the scrutinizers you face now or in the future have favorable or negative opinions toward golf's use of water, what's needed for productive discussion is accurate information and evidence of action. There's ample evidence that becoming defensive (about most anything) accomplishes little and can even make things worse. In contrast, defending one's position with objective information, solid evidence and consideration of the concern of the scrutinizers has the potential for further discussion and building new solutions.

As various groups become increasingly concerned and vocal about water use, superintendents must speak up by using information on the environmental and economic value of golf. They should also provide objective information about actual water-management practices in order to protect their courses' water rights and gain equal time and consideration from water regulators as water restrictions or conservation measures and mandates are being developed. The question is: How do you do this?

The first step is to make sure our own houses are in order, by showing a commitment to water and environmental stewardship through voluntarily implementing as many water conservation practices as possible — and integrating a focus on “as little as possible as efficiently as possible” into daily operations. With increased demands on water at many levels and no new readily available water sources, it just makes sense — practically and politically — to find ways to use less water. And it's good for not only your water image, but also for the agronomics of your course and your facility's budget.

Getting out the word about the commitment to

efficient water use at your facility is also important for showing that you share the concerns of state regulatory agencies and the general public — and are putting your concern into action. When you enhance your reputation as a conscious water-use expert and communicate that message internally and externally, you increase your chances of having an equal seat at the table when water policy discussions arise.

However, no matter how conscientious, proactive and objective you are about conserving water on your course and communicating that along with golf's positive impacts, golf courses are likely targets for criticism, particularly during periods of drought when neighbors are being cautioned or required to restrict water use, and they see (lots of) water continuing to be applied across your course. If enough complaints reach legislators, the legislators can't help but listen. And if the complainants' voices are louder and clearer than the golf industry's, chances of negotiating a fair deal on water regulations, or any other political mandates for that matter, are much lower. This is where working together is important and powerful.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Solicit the involvement of your colleagues at your golf course and in the industry to develop a strategy for addressing negative perceptions. Again, objective information and evidence is vital, and good communication is the best tool you have for diffusing any problems that may arise with local governments or community members.

No one knows for sure what the future holds, but there's no time like the present to re-evaluate the water management and cultural practices on your golf course with the goal of being able to demonstrate responsible water use while providing quality playing conditions. ■

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