

Viewing a Challenge as an Opportunity

BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

Today, there's no doubt that a greater emphasis is being placed on sustainable practices and water conservation. As a result, more people around the world are becoming aware of the need to use water wisely.

Our personal decisions have a tremendous impact on the amount of fresh water available for future use. Replacing a dripping faucet or turning off the water when we brush our teeth — these are choices that few others may know about or acknowledge. However, the choices that golf course superintendents make about irrigation can be highly visible to anyone who patronizes, visits or simply drives by a golf course.

Because water conservation awareness has improved, golf courses are now experiencing a higher level of scrutiny than ever before. As more people come to understand the severity of the world's water issues, immaculately kept golf courses with rotors swishing a steady stream of water back and forth have become somewhat of a target. While it's tempting to look on this intense scrutiny as both uncomfortable and unfair, those superintendents who choose to view this challenge as an opportunity to set their courses apart will thrive. This is the time for them to think outside the box and find new ways to lower the amount of water they use to irrigate their courses.

Technology has made it possible for superintendents to use less water while still providing an attractive, highly playable course. Sophisticated control systems and rotors with adjustable arcs now offer the



IT'S NO LONGER
JUST ABOUT
WALKING THE
WALK — IT'S
ALSO ABOUT
TALKING
THE TALK

type of water efficiency and precision irrigation that could only be imagined a few short years ago. A new appreciation for native plants and grasses has replaced much of the desire for thirstier, more exotic species. Elaborate systems for harvesting rainwater and cooling system condensate have opened the door to more sustainable irrigation practices at golf courses and commercial sites around the world.

However, the challenge faced by golf courses today doesn't end after irrigation systems have been upgraded, harvesting systems have been developed or more drought-tolerant turf and plants have been installed. Changing public perception of golf courses as indiscriminate users of fresh water will be the true test. Owners and managers accustomed to only touting their courses' rating and beauty should strongly consider mentioning their environmental efforts as well. It's no longer just about walking the walk—it's also about talking the talk.

Through motivation and willingness to adapt, golf courses can change their reputations as "water wasters," just as each of us can have a cumulative, positive impact on the amount of water we use every day. As a provider of irrigation systems around the world, Rain Bird has and will continue to support those superintendents who have taken on this challenge by continuing to develop products that encourage The Intelligent Use of Water™. ■

Roberts is director of Rain Bird's Golf Division.

