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JOEL JACKSON, *Senior Contributing Editor*

Dealing with a harsh Mother Nature

The old saying, “It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature,” was a real oxymoron this year as she pulled the plug on turf managers north of the Mason-Dixon line. Mother Nature did all the fooling around with a new toy she got this year called the Polar Vortex.

Even the Deep South, including North Florida, didn’t dodge the bullet as rare snow and ice storms shut down roads and air travel. The abandoned cars on interstates in Atlanta and Durham, N.C., made the national news as testaments to the freakish winter.

In the South, clubs hosted their season-ending member-guest tournaments and superintendents started dragging out the aerifiers, sweepers and verticutters, just waiting for the snow birds to fly home for the warm season.

As play slows down in the Sun Belt, local superintendent chapter activities crank up with traditional fundraising and education events. Superintendents have a little more time now to devote to continuing education, networking and maybe even playing a little golf.

Normally, northern superintendent chapters and turf associations have their big regional turf conferences and meetings in the winter when the courses are closed. This year however, the weather made that an “iffy” proposition at best.

While all these storms were ravaging the middle and eastern regions of the coun-

try, a record drought placed a serious hurt on the golf industry out west. Irrigation water is undergoing severe rationing measures and, in some cases, courses are being cut-off completely, causing some course closures. Even traditional agriculture is facing severe cutbacks or bans on pumping water.

There’s no fooling around out there when you’re talking about losing your business and your job. It isn’t too far fetched to think that more desalination plants might be on the horizon along the entire U.S. coastline. Costs will go up, but what’s the alternative? Shutting down all uses but basic public consumption in the home?

That move would kill production agriculture and turf management industries in areas where annual rainfall is low or aquifers are drawing down.

It still drives me mad to see public consumption of outdoor water use continue down its ignorant path of the “set and forget” mentality for lawn and commercial irrigation systems. Last week we had two consecutive days of good soaking rains and as I ran some errands, not only were some commercial landscape systems running, they were running in the rain, past 10 a.m., both violations of basic irrigation conservation practices.

When you stop and think about how many times a day a superintendent or his staff inspects the performance of their systems and adjusts the daily run times based on the weather, is it too much to ask homeowners, condo owners associations, shopping centers and public works departments to appoint someone to at least flip a switch to “off” when it’s raining?

I urge superintendents to share common sense and easy steps to water conservation, with your golfers. Last month was officially “Water Conservation Month” in Florida, but there is no season needed to educate your members and golfing customers about your environmental stewardship.

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