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In today's tight economy, an assessment of what you *really* need is more important than ever

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Remember that old jalopy you drove in college? God bless that bucket of bolts for getting you around. When that beater finally broke down, however, you had two choices of what to do with it — buy new wheels or take the heap to a mechanic to see if he could inject it with new life.

You weren't sure what to do, however, because you didn't know jack about what's under the hood. You weren't sure if you needed a new ride or if your old one just needed a tune-up. Big money was riding on your decision, though. What to do?

If you're a superintendent with an antiquated irrigation system, you can probably relate. You know the course's irrigation system needs repairs, but you're not sure what it needs and where it needs it. You ask yourself: Should I spend the house and upgrade to an entirely new irrigation system, or should I spend frugally and upgrade only the components that need to be modernized?

Decisions don't get much tougher for superintendents. There's a lot of money riding on the choice, as well as possibly a superintendent's reputation.



MIKE KLEMME

The decision should come down to a proper assessment of an irrigation system's needs. Sounds easy, like a short par 3, but it can be brain-draining.

"There's more to it than meets the eye," says David Davis, an irrigation consultant in Crestline, Calif. "It's not as simple as just looking for worn-out parts."

Assessing a problem is as much about being patient, attentive, organized and responsive as it is about being technically savvy. If a superintendent is all of those things while making an assessment, his decision about what to do with his irrigation system will be that much easier.

Irrigation Evaluation



Urgent, but ...

There's a problem with the irrigation system, and it needs to be fixed — pronto. James Pitman, certified superintendent of Rolling Hills CC in Lomita, Calif., says superintendents must possess a sense of urgency when it comes to diagnosing problems with irrigation systems and fixing them.

Putting off fixing the problems will only lead to more trouble, Davis warns. "We call that deferred maintenance," he says, noting that some superintendents will defer major repairs for three to five years.

A fine and frightening example of deferred maintenance is a superintendent who doesn't pay attention to the deteriorating electrical grounding on the course's field controllers. "He puts off repairing it because he has to get on his hands and knees and get dirty to do it," Davis says.

Meanwhile, the ground wiring becomes loose and frayed. As a result, the controllers are damaged.

The bottom line: It doesn't take long for deferred maintenance to come back to haunt you, Davis says. "If you don't have a sense of urgency to solve a problem now, you might create a bigger problem later," he adds.

While a sense of urgency is important, you have to be careful not to be *too* urgent. A superintendent who's overeager to fix an irriga-

tion problem may be in danger of rushing or even bypassing an assessment. Then he ends up tinkering — or "fixing" a problem before he knows what it is.

Tinkering will only get a superintendent into trouble, Davis says. When the exasperated superintendent discovers after three hours that what he thought was the problem isn't really the problem, there's enough steam coming out of his ears to drive a tub down the Mississippi. "The problem with tinkering is you can make a problem worse," Davis stresses.

Superintendent Bob Miller has been there and done that, and he warns superintendents not to tinker — lest they enjoy mental anguish. Before Endicott, N.Y.-based En-Joie GC upgraded its irrigation system about five years ago, Miller found himself toying and trying to fix outmoded irrigation heads. It was not fun. "Tinkering turns into frustration," Miller says, recalling a time when he was ready to pull his hair out.

Gettin' the low-down

Experience is important when assessing an irrigation system for repairs. Irrigation technology isn't rocket science, but it's also not as simple as A-B-C. It takes someone with knowledge and skill to make an assessment.

That person could be a veteran superin-

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The question is: Should you spend the house on a new irrigation system or spend frugally on only the components you really need?

A high-angle photograph of a golf course green. In the foreground, a man in a dark suit and white gloves is sweeping the grass with a broom and a dustpan. In the background, two other men in suits are also sweeping the green. The scene is brightly lit, casting long shadows. The text "PARTICULAR ABOUT YOUR FAIRWAYS?" is centered in the upper half of the image.

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