



On Making Recommendations— When Do You Make Changes?

(Or... "Snow mold applications—
early or late?")

By Dr. Gayle Worf

There's an old axiom that many of us follow rather religiously: "If it works, don't change it". Another way of putting it is "If it ain't broken, don't fix it!" We've thought about that a lot regarding the traditional practice of waiting until the last minute to lay down the fungicides intended to last through the winter for snow mold control. That's what both labels and "wisdom" have suggested for many decades. So why change? Doesn't it work? Is there something wrong with it?

For the last several years we've been growing in our belief that there really is something wrong with that practice, especially when so many superintendents get caught by a surprisingly early snowstorm, one that stays until spring—and without any protectant fungicides laid down! That didn't happen this last winter, but it did the year before, as well as several more in recent years, which prompted our seeking the cooperation from twenty golf course managers around the state to see whether their results would match our research observations over the previous several years.

The date of application does sometimes make a difference, according to our experience—the problem is, sometimes an early application is better, while on other occasions a later treatment provides better protection. On most occasions, we don't think it makes that much difference, though.

Let's look at the results of the last few years as an example. In 1983-84, we applied chemicals on October 21 and November 10 at Wausau C.C. with Walt Stepanik, and on October 28 and November 18 at Westmoor C.C. with Jerry Kershasky. At Westmoor, where only pink snow mold developed, nearly all applications of Caloclor, Daconil, Bayleton, Terremec, Terraclor and experimentals were better with the earlier (October 28) date than the later date. Both pink and gray mold developed at Wausau, and Caloclor and higher (8 oz) rates of Terraclor were equally effective on both dates. Terremec and

Daconil results were also about equal, while Bayleton and the 4 ounce rate of Terraclor were somewhat better at the later date.

Our application dates were somewhat later in 1984-85 (November 8 and 29 at Wausau, November 9 and 30 at Westmoor), and we had fewer comparisons by dates (only experimentals and Terraclor). Those treatment dates did not influence efficacy, though they were later than we ordinarily would suggest.

In 1985-86 our tests were confined to the Stevens Point C.C., with Jeff Bottensek, where we could try the chemicals on a bentgrass nursery. We planned for two dates—October 26 and November 12. You guessed it—we were "snowed out" for the winter by the second date, and didn't get it applied. And so were a lot of superintendents! However, the October 26 Caloclor treatments, either alone or in lower rate combinations with Terraclor or Terremec provided nearly complete control of gray snow mold. No pink snow mold was noted. "Fairway rate" combinations of Terraclor (4oz) + Terremec (3 oz) also looked good. Early treatments were the only answer that year. In this past season's results there, just completed, late (November 14) applications of Caloclor (3 oz), Terraclor (4 oz) + chloroneb (3 oz.), of Terraclor (8 oz), trended better than October 27 applications, but the results were not statistically different.

The biggest disadvantage I've noted to date with earlier treatments has been the greater tendency for phytotoxicity from mercurials, especially, and PCNB to a lesser extent. I don't perceive this as a problem on fairways, where mercurials are not allowed, and the PCNB damage we've seen—with the lower rates used on fairways, especially—is not significant. No differential injuries have been noted with most other products, including chloroneb, which sometimes acts as a "safener" for mercury and PCNB. Some superintendents favor split treat-

ments, applying some product in late October, and following with the completed dosage in November for their greens and tees. While we've not tried that, because of various time constraints, it may be the ideal way to go. But the big advantage of early applications shows up when inclement November weather occurs! Not only do we run risks of not getting chemicals laid down, we sometimes are restricted to use of granules only because of cold weather.

So what did our cooperators find out? For all of our concerns about summer diseases, snow mold remains potentially the most damaging disease complex affecting Wisconsin golf courses. Some may wonder about that, following the mild winter we just had. We didn't pick a good year to enlist the aid of cooperators in testing treatment dates. We received reports back from 11 cooperators, and most indicated that the winter was too mild to provide a realistic comparison. They used product(s) of their choice, applied at two different dates, made comparisons, and shared the results on a survey form with me. Virtually all date comparisons yielded equal results. Mark Kienert at Bull's Eye Country Club had a more severe snow mold year than other reporters, and he invited me to visit his course to look at the results on his fairways. This was their first year of treating fairways, which were treated with three ounces of Terraclor on October 27 and November 5. Results weren't perfect—but they were spectacular! There was only about 10% as much pink snow mold in the treated versus non-treated areas, regardless of treatment date.

I think we'll try this cooperative test another year. If you want to be a participant this fall, please contact me. We'd welcome your observations!

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