Spring is Near: What's on the Horizon?

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This past winter in Wisconsin has been relatively "mild," all things considered. We received our first measurable snowfall before the ground had a chance to adequately freeze. In addition, we continued to receive ample amounts (> 40 inches) of snowfall, further "insulating" the unfrozen soil. Subsequently, many important turfgrass insect pests, especially white grubs, may ultimately benefit from this situation.

Such conditions often stimulate a frequently asked question: how will the "mild winter" affect insect populations? The most logical response to this question is that insect populations will most likely be higher than normal. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to this question. Factors such as abiotic (non-living) and biotic (living) all play a role in an insect's ability to survive. Such obvious abiotic factors include: temperature, humidity, and light intensity. Other abiotic factors such as precipitation (rainfall/snow), wind, barometric pressure, and even altitude can affect insects. Because insects are cold-blooded, they react or respond with great sensitivity to temperature. Biotic factors, which include diseases, natural enemies and food shortage, can also influence insects. And biotic factaion or "bottom line" for insect populations or infestations in 2001? This question is nearly impossible to answer, but it is relatively safe to say that barring any late winter or early spring "hard" freezes or spring monsoons or flooding, 2001 may result in a "good" year for insects. This may be especially true for the two white grub species (i.e., Japanese and May/June beetles). As you may be aware, Japanese beetles are slowly staking their claim in Wisconsin turf. To further this problem, last year's observations of May/June beetle adults indicate or suggest that we can anticipate or expect above normal grub infestations and possible damage in 2001.

The best prediction strategy is to simply closely monitor and/or periodically sample your turf on a regular basis. In addition, communicate with your staff, nearby colleagues, university specialists, or the University of Wisconsin Turf Diagnostic Lab (TDL).