USGA

SOME LIKE IT HOT

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However, I doubt there are any superintendents from the North-Central Region in that group. So far, the story of the summer has been the extended periods of hot, humid weather and the inconsistent rainfall. Temperatures well into the 90's that peaked out at least once at 100 degrees along with warm humid nights provided ideal conditions for intense disease activity. Throw a 3 or 4-inch rain and a windstorm into the pot every 6 weeks or so just to make things more difficult.

It has been a season of extremes. Cool days, cold nights and hard frosts were common occurrences well into May. These conditions persisted into early June at courses in the northern portions of the Region. On a positive note, green speed was not much of an issue until mid-June because topgrowth was set back by the cold air and soil temperatures. Weeds, however, had little competition from slowly growing turf. Clover could be found just about everywhere - roughs, fairways, tees, and collars. Attempts to control clover during the cool/cold weather rarely produced the desired result. Once the hot weather arrived, a bumper crop of crabgrass became well entrenched in thin areas of turf across the course.

Older courses where the playing surfaces are dominated by *Poa annua* have suffered the most from the drought and heat. *Poa* had an opportunity to develop a deep, healthy root system during long stretches of unusually cool weather in April and May. Roots died back, though, when the weather pattern did a rapid 180 degree turn during mid-June.

By July, it rarely took more than a day to find out where a sprinkler had malfunctioned. The patch of

brown, stressed turf was a dead giveaway. Diseases such as *Pythium* blight and brown patch were a concern unless you had plenty of money in the budget for spraying. Even then, spray intervals needed to be shortened and rates increased to protect the turf. For the less fortunate, the loss of revenue during the cool spring meant budget cuts and little money available for extra fungicides, especially fungicides for fairways. Consequently, many courses had no other choice than to take their lumps and lose fairly substantial amounts of turf in fairways.

Sometimes colonies of *Poa* simply thinned out then died after a few exceptionally hot days regardless of fungicide treatments or syringing. Losses of turf were typically more severe in areas compacted by carts or foot traffic.

Traffic, wilt, and other stress appeared make the turf more susceptible to diseases such as basal rot anthracnose, and you were in deep trouble if this disease came to visit your course. Expect to apply treatments of contact/systemic fungicide tank mixes at high rates and frequent intervals to control this disease once it moves off the foliage and into the stems and crowns. For the fortunate few who had only a little annual bluegrass in the playing surfaces, the anthracnose was considered free *Poa* control. For others, it has been a devastating disease on greens and fairways.

The hot weather drove earthworms deeper into the soil, but insect pests appeared to thrive. Ants have been more active than usual. Once the ant mounds smothered a silver dollar-sized area of turf on a green or tee, the rate of recovery was extremely slow - especially on *Poa annua* playing surfaces. Sod webworm damage took a number of superintendents by surprise, since it's hard to believe such a little caterpillar can cause significant injury. Crows and grackles usually found the webworms first and they contributed to the turf injury.

All in all, it has been a difficult season. It seems to be passing by quickly, yet many superintendents have become exhausted by the daily grind of keeping turf alive during the hot weather. Maybe years like this will make us all appreciate a mild summer much more in the future.