

Heads Up

By **Robert Vavrek**, Senior Agronomist, United States Golf Association

Old irrigation systems rarely provide uniform water coverage across the fairways, surrounds and other high play areas of the course. The expectations of today's golfers for firm, consistent playing conditions far exceeds the capabilities of antiquated single row fairway designs, worn nozzles, and damaged/misaligned heads that are commonly found scattered throughout an old layout. In fact, overly soft, wet playing surface conditions are among the most common golfer complaints heard on Turf Advisory Service visits throughout the season. In general, courses eventually spend a fair amount of time and money on pump house maintenance and controller upgrades, but little attention is paid to the basic sprinklers unless

one sticks on all night or fails to turn properly for several consecutive nights during the heat of summer.

Less than ideal installation procedures, frost heaving, damage from maintenance equipment and topdressing accumulations around sprinklers are several factors that can affect irrigation system performance. Considering the current economy, approval for that comprehensive irrigation system upgrade may take a few years longer than expected. Consequently, make the best of what you have by making an extra effort to raise and level the low, problem sprinklers - a simple, but labor intensive task that is often put on the back burner...forever.

No doubt, fall would be the best time to raise sprinklers to provide

time for the disturbed soil to settle over the winter, but don't use that as an excuse to put off the project for another year. There is still ample time to train a crew and initiate sprinkler maintenance for at least some of the high priority sites on the course before the heat stress of mid-summer arrives. By the end of the season, familiarity with the procedure will make for a more efficient operation. As time permits, test for irrigation coverage uniformity and contact irrigation suppliers regarding nozzle upgrades that may significantly improve coverage at a fraction of the cost of complete sprinkler replacement. 

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