

# In Recovery

By Bob Vavrek, Senior Agronomist, USGA Green Section

**N**ews Flash: golf course superintendents cannot control the weather. Therefore, they have relatively little ability to prevent winter injury when turf dominated by *Poa annua* is subjected to numerous, severe freeze/thaw cycles. Under certain circumstances, a properly installed cover system can provide a fair degree of protection from winterkill, but, in today's economy, fewer and fewer golf courses have neither the materials or early winter labor available to cover greens. For most courses, the only remaining option is to topdress greens after applying snow mold protection and then hope for the best.

On the other hand, we have much more control regarding how we tackle the task of encouraging turf recovery following an episode of winter injury. Wear and compaction across damaged turf can be addressed by taking severely affected sites out of play. Plastic sheeting or standard turf covers can be employed to artificially elevate soil temperatures during the cool weather of early spring. Seed can be primed or pre-germinated to jump start the recovery process. However, all is for naught if we cannot maintain consistent soil moisture levels.

Applying frequent irrigation to turf during early spring tends to contradict fundamental turf management principals, but the unwillingness or inability to apply ample irrigation to struggling turf and newly emerged seedlings can greatly prolong the recovery process. How many times have you made an extra effort to aggressively seed thin areas only to find that the fresh crop of immature plants seems to melt away and disappear within a week or so? Just a single



Increased irrigation may be necessary for spring recovery

afternoon of low humidity, sunlight, and windy conditions without supplemental irrigation could be the problem. It's easy to forget that that mature, well rooted turf can tolerate much more moisture stress compared to fragile seedlings.

Covers raise soil temperatures, but they serve as a mulch to keep moisture in the upper root zone. Similarly, taking the damaged turf out of play provides an opportunity to irrigate the site as often as needed without causing an inconvenience to golfers. It's no surprise that a damaged area that is not covered, taken out of play, or watered frequently will take a very long time to recover.

Still struggling with winterkill this spring? Re-evaluate your watering practices. It could mean the difference between being *in recovery* or business as usual. 🌱

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