

Peace Of Mind

By Bob Vavrek, Senior Agronomist, United States Golf Association

Calls regarding winter injury are on the increase now that a few days of mild temperatures and heavy rain have washed away the snow. The unmistakable stench of dead, decaying grass is overwhelming in sites that lack adequate surface drainage. Localized areas in the region experienced deep snow cover over ice since the nasty cold snap in early December. A dense crust of gray snow mold across untreated areas of fairways and roughs will be a one reminder of winter until turf eventually grows out of this superficial injury. Unfortunately, another reminder for some will be winterkill across low-lying areas of greens and fairways where crown hydration and/or three months of ice suffocation have killed *Poa annua*.

The nearly overnight disappearance of snow coupled with a sunny day or two and the recent adjustment to Daylight Savings time have definitely given golfers the itch to play. Many golfers couldn't care less about turf damage on the course when under the influence of cabin fever. After all, a dead green doesn't look all that different from other brown, dormant turf this time of the year. Besides, a dead green is really fast and relatively smooth as long as a lot of turf died instead of only a spot here and a spot there.

Golfers eager to play, and the potential for unexpected green fee revenue during March, is a pretty good start to the season considering the unreliable golf market these days. Yet, opening the course to play this early makes some superintendents very uneasy when additional snow and cold weather could easily occur anytime within the next month or so. Furthermore, it's still difficult to tell the extent of damage to *Poa* until a fair amount of green-up occurs. No one wants to cause additional turf injury across weak turf or delay the recovery process of winterkill in exchange for a few dollars of early green fees. On the other hand, it makes no sense to needlessly send your golfers to spend money at another course.

Having to wait on Mother Nature to determine the extent of turf injury is frustrating during cool spring weather. The benefits of removing and growing out samples of turf from potential winter-kill areas of greens throughout the winter have been discussed in previous updates. There is no reason why similar sampling techniques cannot be employed now to determine whether or not early season play will compromise playing conditions later this season.

Removing a few samples from greens is easy now

that snow and ice cover are gone. Still, taking samples indoors and placing the turf on a windowsill will not guarantee rapid green up. The key is finding a sunny window, and even a sunny site is worthless on cloudy days. The solution is simple and inexpensive.

Go to the hardware store and purchase a couple of fluorescent, wide-spectrum grow lights that are commonly used to illuminate aquariums or indoor plantings. Set up a few units on a workbench and place the turf samples within a few inches of the lights. Unlike incandescent bulbs, there will be little heat generated by the fluorescent bulbs to damage the turf. Place the samples as close as possible to the lights to maximize

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light intensity across the foliage.

An inexpensive timer can be used to provide the samples about 18 hours of light per day. Don't worry about trying to mimic spring-time day length, since the idea is to get any live grass growing as fast as possible. Use this technique, and the live turf should green up and

begin growing within about five days or so to provide valuable information regarding the condition of putting surfaces. Samples taken during the winter can be quickly processed the same way, and the whole setup doesn't cost more than \$50. Not a bad price to pay for some peace of mind and, as an added

bonus, the rare opportunity to thumb your nose at Mother Nature.

No doubt, the idea of using grow lamps to maintain grass indoors may have already occurred to some of you in the past, especially veteran superintendents attending turf schooback in the 60's and 70's. 

Coming Events

**April 19 Monday, Abbey Springs GC Fontana
Host - David E Smith**

**May 10 Monday, Wild Rock GC, Wisconsin Dells
Host - Mike Blazich**

**June 8 Tuesday, WI Super/Pro Morningstar GC Waukesha (WI PGA Event)
Host - Travis Krauklis**

**July 12 Monday, Watertown CC, Watertown
Host - Michael Upthegrove**

**July 19-22, Wisconsin State Amateur
The Bull, Sheboygan, Host - Pat Shaw**

**July 27 Tuesday, Summer Field Day
OJ Noer Research Facility, Verona**

**August 9 Monday, Oneida Golf and CC, Green Bay
Host - Mark Storby**

**August 12-15, 92 PGA Championship
Straits Course at Whistling Straits, Sheboygan, Host - Mike Lee**

**August 23-25, Wisconsin State Open
The Legend at Bristlcone, Hartland - Host Josh Lepine**

**September 20, Monday, Wee One Fundraiser
Pine Hills C.C. Sheboygan, Host - Rod Johnson**

**October 8 & 9, Couples Weekend Saddle Ridge GC, Portage
Host - Seth Brogen**

October (TBA) WTA Fundraiser for the Fellowship

**Nov 16-17, Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium
Kohler, American Club**