

The Winter Of 2014

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As I sit down to write this article it is snowing. Many times that statement will give you an idea of when I wrote this article, but this year it seems to be snowing every other day. It is early March and recently winter has loosened its grip on Wisconsin and the upper Midwest. Snow has started to melt and Superintendents and Grounds Managers are beginning to rustle. The talk of ice damage is very popular in southeast Wisconsin, Chicago and southern Michigan. Last year at many of you had your bout with ice covered turf. For many of you your worst fears were answered last spring with dead turfgrass in lawns, sports fields and golf courses. A few of our colleagues were able to turn the bad situation into a positive with a much needed re-grassing project, re-grading project to improve surface drainage or just the removal of some key trees. Time and time again tragedy is the impudence for change.

What will the spring of 2014 bring? That is a hard question to answer! Talking to many of you over the past few

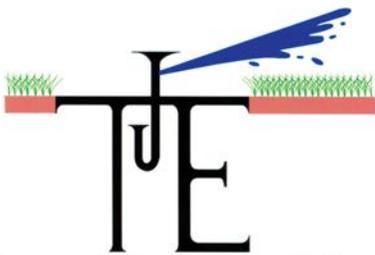
weeks the conditions are very different throughout the state, but to me appear to be much more "normal" for a Wisconsin winter. I am hearing reports of soil temperature in the mid-twenties, greens plugs being brought inside and greening up, or greens as hard as rocks with frost but not too many reports of ice. What does all this mean, I do not think anyone can give us a definite answer but I hope things will be fine. Some of the concerns I do have are in the southern part of the state and northern Illinois where some snow mold programs were not built around grey snow mold (*Typhula incarnata*) control.

In recent history there has been minimal grey snow mold damage in the southern part of the state and as budgets have been restrained Superintendents have chosen to develop their snow mold spray program around *Microdochium Patch* (*Microdochium nivale*). These programs usually do not provide adequate grey snow mold control. The extended snow cover in southern Wisconsin this winter is creating excellent conditions

for grey snow mold development. The extreme cold and the frozen soil surface may hinder the *Typhula incarnata* development, let's hope. Every year Superintendents try to improve their snow mold control program and make changes after reviewing Dr. Koch's snow mold trial results. I encourage you to be proactive and study these snow mold study results each year but, caution you to compare many years worth of data. One year a product or combination might look good but the pressure may have been low and that level of control may not be repeated in subsequent or previous years.

I know that budgets are the driving influence but every golfer putts out on every hole, they might not see all the fairways, but greens are that long lasting memory of your course. In a year like this if you may have significant grey snow mold damage, what will the cost be in lost revenue, seed, fertilizer, and labor be to make the needed repair? Compare that to the added cost of including grey snow mold control into your program? Many times the best budget decision might be to spend the money to continue with a grey snow mold control program.

Other interesting issues that have come across my desk for discussion are vole damage, rabbit damage, and salts. I think we are going to see turf damage along sidewalks, parking lots, driveways and any roadway that borders your property. As the snow piles up the amount of salt in that snow just kept accumulating. There was salt applied and the next day or two it snowed again and all that salt was plowed away and the cycle started over. Some of these piles are full of road salt. If you encounter salt damage to your turf I would recommend aeration, apply gypsum, tying up some of the salts and watering in well, and hope for a few good soaking rains.



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After a few days, allowing the gypsum to work, seed the area and apply a starter fertilizer of your choice. For damaged areas that are not covered by your



A simple battery operated timer can save time and ensure adequate moisture when needed.

irrigation system but might be near a water source look into purchasing a cheap timer for a garden hose. Most of these are battery operated and can be set to run two times per day. These can be just the ticket to get that seed to germinate and the turfgrass growing.

Irrigation water sources that are recharged with runoff water could lead



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to some other issues. The salt levels of these sources may be elevated this spring until we receive enough rainfall to dilute the system or pump enough water into the system to dilute the salts. This spring would be a great time to have your irrigation water tested. This will alert you to any real soluble salt issues that exist. I encourage you to repeat that water test in the fall so you can have baseline history of irrigation water. The results may prove quite useful this spring and in the future. If you encounter problems I would encourage you to talk with Dr. Soldat on the best practices to combat the issue.

In a recent conversation with Morton Arboretum they were seeing rabbit damage to trees and ornamentals. From the picture below you can see the rabbits ate the bark off the plants and as the snow depth rose the amount of damaged increased. This spring might be very hard on young trees and ornamentals. Be on the lookout for those young trees and ornamentals under stress and give them some needed extra attention and be prepared to replace any

that do not survive those pesky rabbits.

As we all know voles love to eat turf under a protective layer of snow. Many of the predators could not hunt them or reach them this winter. When left unchecked by predation and adequate snow cover the damage can be devastating. The long deep snow cover this winter may make the spring on 2014 the "Year of the vole". By the time we realize we have vole damage it is too late to control them so we turn to the damage they leave behind. Don't panic over the damage, many times they will not kill the turf plants and have just eaten the tops of the plants. If this is the case wait until the weather warms enough to promote good growth and apply a light fertilizer application to aid in the re-growth. If the areas are dead then pull out the bags of seed and starter in early May and make the repair.

Remember that the WTA Summer Field Day at the OJ Noer is Tuesday July 29th. The fall WTA Golf Outing will be held this year at University Ridge Golf Course on Tuesday October 7th. 



Rabbit damage will be common after a long snowcovered winter.



I smell a vole!