

Who's Using All The Water?

“Why do golf courses get to ‘waste’ so much water?”

That’s what some casual observers are wondering out loud when they see an irrigation system at work on fairways, tees or greens.

As with many things having to do with managing often scarce resources, people just driving by a golf course have a tendency to jump to conclusions — very often, the wrong ones.

These often well-meaning, but misinformed, citizens could do well to look at their own backyards, and those of their neighbors, before pointing an accusing finger. Residential and commercial (business places, industrial parks and corporate offices) irrigation has expanded more than 30 percent in the last 15 years and, according to the Irrigation Association of America, more than 20 million acres of residential and commercial landscape are irrigated today. Golf courses account for only 1.3 million acres.

And, these figures consider just the fairly sophisticated irrigation installations found in residential areas (albeit they may be do-it-yourself systems) and not the friendly neighbor with his lawn sprinkler and garden hose who puts as much water on driveway and sidewalk as he does the lawn.

Since 85 percent of this residential market gets its water from public sources or private water agencies, the cost of putting water on this property is substantial. The Association estimates that residential and commercial installations use about 20 million acre feet of water each year. If an acre foot (325,000 gallons of water) costs \$400, the value of the water applied by these systems would be in the neighborhood of \$7 billion. (According

to the American Water Works Association, the average cost of public water to residential users is \$572 per acre foot.)

By contrast, the golf course industry uses fewer than 2 million acre feet of water each year — less than 10 percent of what’s used by homeowners. And, many golf courses draw irrigation water from wells on the property, or ponds and impoundments built just for that purpose. They don’t rely on public water sources for irrigation

Since the first automatic landscape irrigation systems were invented, nearly a century ago, residential

irrigation has often been considered a luxury rather than a necessity, but that’s no longer the case for many people. Next time a well-intended, but shortsighted neighbor questions your “wasting” water, share some of these figures. Billions of dollars can be saved by homeowners and business owners making better use of irrigation technology — the kind of technology golf course superintendents use every day!

(Editor’s Note: This article was reprinted with permission from JD Approach on behalf of John Deere Golf & Turf Division by Royle Publications.)

