

ON THE ROAD WITH THE USGA

By **BOB BRAME**, *USGA Agronomist*

There have been a few diseases spotted during recent visits, but so far courses in the lower portion of the North Central Region seem to be coming out of the winter in reasonably good condition. Mole activity has kicked in and now is the time to begin aggressive trapping if these furry tunnelers are a problem at your golf course.

Recent Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visits have focused on when recently planted greens can be opened for play. It is important to keep in mind that a putting surface will look ready for play well before it can actually handle traffic. Generally speaking, turf density must first be closed at the initial grow-in height of 1/4 to 1/2 inch (depending upon the cultivar). Once good density exists at the grow-in level, mowing height reduction can be initiated. Topdressing should be initiated ahead of mowing height reduction to help protect the plant as the cut is lowered. The key to maintaining good density as the height is lowered is patience; that is, very slight reductions in the bench setting, several mowings, and repeat the cycle. Once a new putting surface has reached the maintenance level, sufficient additional growth is needed to achieve some organic matter or a thin pad development between the leaf tissue and root zone. Without the pad to provide resilience, traffic wear can quickly thin density and yield poor playability. Bottom line, if your course planted one or more new greens last fall, be patient and allow sufficient maturation to occur before cutting the ribbon. If it turns out to be a hot and stressful summer the patience will pay dividends.

Another discussion topic over the last few weeks has been the inconsistent turf growth. The cool nighttime temperatures have held down soil temperatures, and as a result, growth has been less than desired, especially at those courses that have already received significant traffic and need the growth to recover from wear. This simply will not occur until soil temperatures increase and allow more consistent growth. In the meantime, do not allow concentrated traffic wear and hold off fertilization. Trying to push growth with fertilizer will not change the soil temperature limitation and it could result in an explosion of growth at some point down the road. Growth inconsistencies in the spring, especially the early spring, should remind us that we are playing on Mother Nature's home court. She's in control, whether it's convenient for our agenda or not.

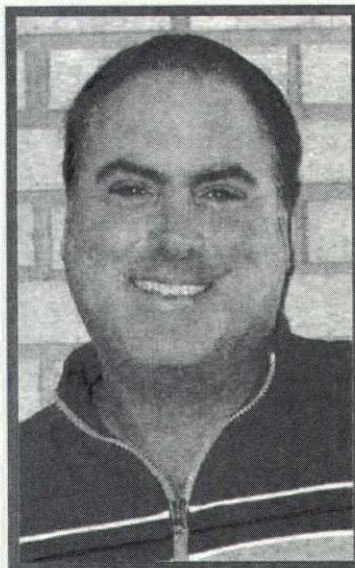
The calendar continues to fill with TAS visit requests. Nevertheless, there is still time to get your request in and realize the early payment discount (payment received by May 15, 2002). Give us a call or return the green postcard enclosed with our January mailing.

We are always available via e-mail and/or phone to interact on the maintenance needs and objectives at your course.

Contact us at anytime by calling 859-356-3272 or by e-mail at bobbbrame@usga.org.

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