

Managing Mower Stress

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Poa annua has taken it on the chin at many golf courses visited recently. Long periods of exceptionally hot, humid weather and sporadic rainfall set the table for intense disease activity and direct high temperature kill. Much of the injury appeared along intermediate roughs, low spots in fairways/greens, and along the first few feet of turf adjacent to the collars. Diseases, such as basal root anthracnose, that were only seen on rare occasions over the past few years have been a common sight on greens and fairways.

A sprinkler head that didn't turn one night, severe afternoon wilt, a hot fertilizer application, aggressive vertical mowing or other forms of stress appeared to predispose the turf to anthracnose at many courses.

What can you do to minimize stress? Here are a few tips regarding mowing practices for greens to consider before or after injury occurs to the playing surfaces. Some of the simplest techniques are the ones we overlook first.

Switch from grooved to solid rollers at the first sign of turf thinning. Solid rollers are especially helpful along the clean up pass.

Use hand mowers instead of triplex units. Be sure to make the proper adjustments to the cutting height. In general, hand mowers cut tighter than triplex units at the same bench setting.

Use lighter weight hand mowers or narrower units to minimize scalping across slopes and high spots.

Keep the mowers sharp.

Empty the basket often. A full basket of wet clippings can change the effective height of cut.

Empty the basket before making the clean up pass.

Slow down the mower when cutting the clean up pass. This is probably one of the easiest ways to reduce stress to turf along the perimeter of a green, yet operator speed is rarely given second thought.

Raise the height of cut if the greens begin to thin out. I don't mean from 0.110 to 0.115 of an inch. I'm talking about a height of at least 5/32 to 3/16 of an inch. How perceptions have changed over the past five years or so. A 5/32 inch cut was once considered tight. Recommend that height now and you get a blank stare back from some folks...as if you asked them to come up to a fairway mowing height.

Forget the double cutting, groomers, and vertical mowers for a while.

Don't be afraid to mow greens at different heights of cut. Consistency of speed between greens will not necessarily be compromised. That thin, weak green in the shade putts faster anyway, so raising the height of cut may actually make the speed across all greens more consistent.

Last, but not least, severely damaged greens may not need to be mowed at all. Skipping a day or two between mowings can help accelerate recovery, especially when the height of cut is raised between mowings.

Take heart, the days are getting shorter and football season is right around the corner.

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On the Road With the USGA

By *R.A. (Bob) Brame, Director*

The lower portion of the North Central Region has moved into a typical summer weather pattern. Some courses have gotten too much rain and others are very dry. Very few have gotten the right amount of assistance from Mother Nature. Keep in mind, while there are many reasons for maintaining a course as dry as applicable variables allow, a key benefit is how the turf will perform should a heavy rainfall occur. If the soil is saturated going into heavy rainfall, then problems can follow as opposed to the superior safety of being on the dry side in advance of a "frog strangler."

Recent visits have found a number of superintendents utilizing various methods to open and vent the upper portion of green root zones. Quadratine attachments equipped with 1/4" solid tines, cross/shatter tines and water injection aeration are the more common tools used for summer opening and venting. Remember, while any type of opening and venting has an element of stress, drowning is fatal. It is very important to have oxygen in the root zone.

Stress-relieving strategies like raising the mowing height and switching to solid front rollers have been a common finding on recent visits. Foliar feeding is also being closely guarded, and remember, light and frequent is the key to achieving maximum value with spoon-feeding. Too little can cause or allow root loss and too much also can compromise root mass. If a measurable clipping increase occurs following a foliar feeding during summer heat, the rate is too high.

The second generation of Ataeius beetles recently have been observed. As opposed to their larger cousins, it is not uncommon to find Ataeius grubs in greens. Sod webworm activity also has been seen at a few courses, along with cutworms. In both cases, the activity has been fairly light and spotty.

A wide array of diseases has been observed relative to variables such as water holding in the upper profile, mowing height, microenvironment and traffic-related abrasion.

While the nights are getting longer, we're not out of the woods just yet. Keep up your guard and, in particular, pay close attention to water management. Take advantage of problems that arise to educate the bosses and set the stage for needed corrective measures.

The agronomists of the North Central Region stand ready to work with you in anyway possible. Give us a call or drop an email.

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