

Slow Recovery

By **BOB VAVREK**
USGA Senior Agronomist

The weather this spring could hardly be worse in light of the widespread winter kill experienced by most old courses across the north-central tier of states. Every *Poa annua*/bentgrass course seen this spring has had significant injury to low, poorly drained areas of fairways and many have damage on greens and tees. We needed a warm, sunny spring with mild nighttime temperatures and frequent rainfall and, so far, an unusually cool, dry weather pattern has prevailed.

Courses that used HPI covers or plastic to raise soil temperatures after overseeding are recovering faster than courses without covers. Plastic sheeting is relatively inexpensive and can raise soil temperatures as much as 10 degrees or higher on a sunny day. In fact, the temperature can increase so fast under plastic that many superintendents try to perforate the 3 - 4

mil thick covers with a spiker or aerifier after they are stapled onto the playing surface to reduce the chances of smothering the turf. The humid environment under plastic is ideal for disease activity, so be sure to treat preventatively for diseases and monitor the thin and bare areas frequently for algae. It's a good idea to remove plastic covers if the air temperature will be above 55 degrees on a sunny day.

Don't forget to remove covers and mow the undamaged turf when necessary. It's easy to forget about the healthy turf under a cover when your focus is on the bare overseeded areas. It's never fun to remove a cover and find undamaged portions of the putting surface looking like unmowed fairway turf.

Fortunately, there is some recovery in some of the areas dominated by *Poa*

annua that appeared to be stone dead a few weeks ago. The key to recovery in these sites has been light, frequent irrigation. Don't be reluctant to lightly water damaged turf several times a day in hope of timely rainfall. Irrigation appears to be just as important as soil temperatures when it comes to recovery this spring.

Recovery will slow or stop now that nighttime temperatures have regressed back into the upper 30's and low 40's across the upper Midwest. With important special events at many courses looming on the horizon, golfers are encouraged to remain patient. The rate of turf establishment will ultimately be determined by the weather patterns over the next several weeks despite our best efforts.

(Editor's Note: Bob Vavrek may be reached at rvavrek@usga.org or 262-797-8743)

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