

Water Management - Don't Forget the Hose

by Rich Scheider

As an Agronomist, I am often asked by superintendents ... what is the biggest problem I see as I travel the Mid-Atlantic area? It really is a very simple question to answer, and that is, management of water on the greens.

There are many factors which contribute to the problem, most of which you all are aware: Soil type, percolation rates, irrigation equipment, localized dry spot, disease pressure and so on; however, there are several other factors that you may not think about that contribute to the problem, such as dependence on automatic systems, reliance on computers and the fact that today's superintendent is being pulled in too many directions at once (i.e., lack of time to think and plan).

If I were to single out one of the factors involved, it would be the reliance on automated systems to syringe greens. I cannot emphasize enough that timers, controllers, etc. need to be checked often to ensure that what you have programmed into the system time wise is what you are receiving from the head at each location. Even the most sophisticated system can end up watering too much on one spot and not enough in another. This happens as much today with sand greens as it does with old push up greens.

This leads to the most important point in my mind, and that is the need to continue to hand water. ; whether it be hot spots in sand greens or hand watering old greens to ensure that we do not over-water one area at the expense of another. During the past few years I have seen the major portion of a green become too wet while trying to syringe hot spots with overhead irrigation. Hand watering is as much an art as a science, and it is as much a part of the 90's as anything else we do on a golf course today. Providing for hand watering should be a part of every new golf course design.

Very often I am told, "I can not hand water, as I do not have enough crew." Well, when the greens are over wet in some areas, and too dry in others, maybe something else needs to be dropped from the program to free up people to hand water. I can not emphasize enough the importance of hand watering during critical times.

Today's irrigation systems are just great. A lot better than anything I have ever worked with; however, we need to pay strict attention to water management.

Always take a soil probe when you check the course.

Make sure your timers are set correctly.

Know how much water is coming out of your heads.

Periodically check the volume to make sure you are getting that you programmed.

When training a crew to hand water, make sure they understand how critical a procedure it is an check them often to make sure they are not dragging out the process in order to get out of another job on a hot day.

As you can see, I have strong feelings about water management, and in particular, the use of a hand-held hose. Every year I see situations that can be avoided.

Get out of the office, carry a probe and manage your water. Proper water management can make or break your season.

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