

Rapid Blight Disease

by Pat Gross, Director

USGA Green Section, Southwest Region

Rapid blight affected an increasing number of golf courses in California last year, and October is an especially good month to be on the lookout for the disease. Rapid blight was first identified by Dr. Larry Stowell in 1995 on a *Poa annua* putting green. It appears to be more prevalent in the fall and winter but has been identified throughout the year on *Poa annua* greens. The disease also affects *Poa trivialis* and perennial ryegrass typically used to overseed bermudagrass greens, tees and fairways. Symptoms include yellowing and discoloration in an irregular pattern followed by further decline and turf death. Close examination of the turfgrass leaves will show dark, water soaked lesions.

Cooperative research efforts among the University of Arizona, Clemson University, and the Pace Research Institute have since identified the fungus as *Labirinthula*, which is a net slime mold that is able to live in high salinity environments. The disease affects *Poa annua* and *Poa trivialis* during the fall and winter months that are under intensive putting green management regimes. Common cultural practices associated with the development of this disease include frequent close mowing, intensive vertical mowing, sand topdressing, double cutting, and rolling *i.e.* practices normally associated with producing fast greens on a regular basis. The research group has made great strides in identifying the life cycle of the fungus and continues to work on identifying cultural and environmental factors that favor disease development. Dr. Paul Petersen at Clemson University is asking for help from courses that have suffered infestations of rapid blight in previous years. Dr. Petersen has developed a survey for superintendents to complete and asks that water samples and turf plugs with potential

symptoms of rapid blight be sent to his laboratory for further diagnosis and to gain a perspective on the distribution of the disease and environmental conditions that promote outbreaks. The survey and instructions on sending water and disease samples are attached to this website update or can be obtained by contacting Dr. Paul Petersen at (843) 622-3526 ext. 133 or by email: ppeters@clemson.edu

In the meantime, the following suggestions will assist in preventing and managing rapid blight:

Monitor the greens for disease symptoms during the fall and winter when cooler temperatures and higher humidity tend to occur.

Avoid core aeration and sand topdressing if symptoms of the disease are present or if the greens appear to be in a weakened condition. If core aeration is necessary to sustain healthy turf growth, you may wish to use smaller diameter hollow tines (*i.e.* 1/4" or 3/8" tines) followed by light sand topdressing and watering the sand into the surface.

Leach greens prior to fall aeration and topdressing to bring salinity levels below 2.7 dS/m. Continue to manage soil salinity by monitoring the greens on a regular basis and scheduling leaching to keep salts below 3.0 dS/m.

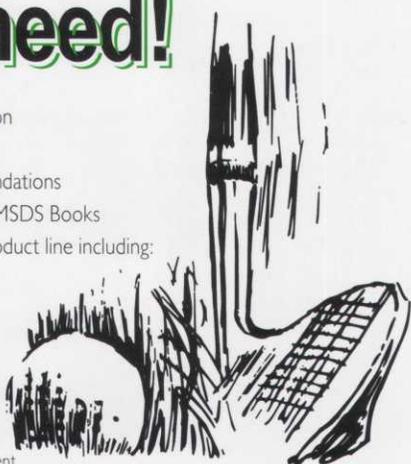
Apply preventive fungicides in the late fall and winter season to suppress disease activity. Fungicides with a supplemental label for the control of rapid blight include Compass, Fore, Protect, and Insignia.

Maintain moderate mowing heights in the range of 0.125" to 0.135" to sustain healthy turf growth throughout the fall and winter.

Additional information on the management and control of Rapid Blight can be obtained by visiting the Pace Turfgrass Research Institute website at www.pace-ptri.com.

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