



## PROSCAPE

By Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D., golf course architect and consultant

**Q:** In your opinion how do you think the energy crisis will effect the future of the industry? G.F., Springfield, IL

**A:** The total impact of an energy crisis, especially for fossil fuels after the Three Mile Island incident, can only be imagined but a possible scenario might be as follows:

1. Rationing of fuel with most dramatic reduction to less essential users (e.g. aesthetic maintenance, recreation, and recreation travel).
2. Reduction in fuel for production of products for less essential use reminiscent of the fertilizer shortage scare of a few years ago.
3. Less production of petroleum based products such as plastic pipe, polyethylene tubing, tires for recreation vehicles.
4. Higher costs of products based on supply and demand and increased shipping costs.

However, I can see some real benefits to at least the golf industry. The energy crisis may allow the industry to gracefully retrench from a spiraling standard of maintenance that has caused maintenance budgets to reach current high levels. If the entire industry was forced to lower their expectations about maintenance levels then sensibility would return and the "getting ahead of the Jones" syndrome of comparing golf course maintenance might subside.

If less was expected of a golf course, such as a few brown spots, less fertilization, water and mowing, then budgets would lower or at least stabilize, and golf would not be priced out of existence. Remember that the cost per round of golf is based on the price it takes to produce that round plus a profit. So if golf can be made less expensive then we have answered one objection voiced by non-golfers and that is "it costs too much" and golf may become more popular. Coupled to this will be reduced gasoline for travel, so more folks may be forced to stay home, which is bad for the pure golf resort, but it is good for hometown golf. Thus, either the local course will get more support and/or new ones will be built.

An energy crisis may spawn innovated methods of maintenance to cope with less energy and synthetic products or it may revive many abandoned, but sound, procedures used before our present mentality of wall to wall perfection. Loss of "wonder" products will force us to do basic thinking again about the total plant, soil, biotic complex and this is definitely good.

Loss of luxury power consumption may force a return to walking golf (as opposed to riding golf) so golf will be considered good exercise once again. Additionally we may see a renewed use of caddies which will not only provide employment for the young, but it will also expose them to golf and one can easily imagine the benefits of this exposure. The loss of income to the Golf Pro from golf carts may be offset by the increased lessons he will give and the cart companies can increase sales by



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selling carts to the general public for neighborhood travel.

**Q:** What process would you recommend for selecting and hiring a Design or Consulting firm? H.W., Dallas, TX

**A:** You already have a headstart in your endeavor because you have begun to ask questions and you realize that selection is a process. Now all you need is to compose a proper set of questions and plan the process.

To increase the probability that you will retain the "best" firm, you should insure that all competent practitioners are aware that you are taking proposals. This can be accomplished by writing a complete and detailed description of your intended project, giving specific guidelines as to your expectations, time table, and any restrictive limitations. This description will allow the interested and qualified firms to be specific about their services and will help you to make your initial selection on paper if there are a large number of proposals. It may be necessary to employ a consultant to write your detailed description and help with the initial "paper" selections if you do not have an in-house expert. Although the best bet is a firm who does this sort of work, usually the university has someone qualified enough to get you started, but do not rely on them exclusively.

To get the greatest dissemination of your descriptive solicitation, contact all professional trade organizations related to the work (e.g. A.S.L.A., A.L.C.A., A.S.G.C.A., G.C.S.A.A., etc.).

Set a deadline for proposals and after reviewing them began an interview process with all firms that interest you. Since these can be time consuming, and you should plan on secondary and tertiary interviews, work backwards to determine the number of initial interviews you can handle based on your budget of time and money. Although how involved an interview should be, depends on the scope of your project, allow about two hours each for the first presentation. This should permit one hour for presentation and one hour for questions.

Since you are employing this Consultant/Designer for their technical abilities, dwell on the method and not just the finished product. Do not be afraid to ask questions about costs, sequence of events, frequency of inspection trips to be made by the principal Consultant, liabilities supporting documents, and guarantees. If several firms interest you ask for a complete list of past clients.

After the initial interview, eliminate those firms that do not seem to offer the services you need. Next make written inquiries about the firms you still feel are in contention and arrange to visit some of their work. I would talk not just with the owners but I would also talk to employees who tend to be more candid.

Once you have done these things, the final interviews should dwell on the specifics and I would ask for a final detailed proposal from the firm that I thought I wanted to employ. Additionally if a team approach is to be used, before final selection gather the tentative team together and insure that all areas of responsibility are understood and that the team feels it can function harmoniously. **WTT**



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