

The irrigation challenge

By now, you've probably been affected in some manner by the green industry's water crisis. And it promises to become an even bigger problem in the future.

As potable water becomes less available to golf courses, home lawns, corporate landscapes and parks, alternatives will have to be found to keep the grass green and healthy. Indeed, one California community (Palm Springs) now has a city code that outlaws any runoff water, under penalty of fine. Homeowners are realizing that they would be well-advised to purchase automatic sprinklers.



So improved irrigation systems will play a key role in helping provide sufficient water for turf.

"I think we've barely touched the needs of irrigation equipment," Dr. James Watson of the Toro Co. told attendees at the GCSAA Mid-Year Conference and Show. "We've got a long way to go, and the irrigation industry is making concerted efforts in that area."

A giant step was taken five or six years ago with the introduction of solid state technology. New digital irrigation controllers—though they've been known to lose their programming when the power goes out—offer turf managers accuracy and flexibility. No longer does water need to be turned on and off by hand, or via a mechanical clock. Waterings of 30 seconds to one minute are now possible, and that feature comes in mighty handy where there is the possibility of runoff from hills and mounds.

Of course, improved turfgrass species which use less water—such as buffalograss and bermudagrass hybrids—are on the horizon. And there might be additional help if researchers can come up with salt-tolerant turfgrass.

The irrigation industry, then, is facing a stretch when improved technology is a necessity. But, just as they've survived for 80 years, irrigation equipment manufacturers will continue to survive—to thrive, even.

"The irrigation industry will not go out of business," says Mike Bravo, national sales manager for the Thompson Manufacturing Co., the nation's oldest manufacturer of sprinklers. "People cannot live without green."

Jerry Roche, editor

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