

Field experience clears maintenance pitfalls

Your golf course maintenance program is composed of many duties and concerns. If you ignore one, you may be creating a problem elsewhere.

Formal research methods gives superintendents many techniques and strategies for maintaining golf course turf, but there's no substitute for field experience and observation when it comes to keeping the turf healthy, says a USGA agronomist.

"An important aspect of improving ourselves is recognizing our mistakes and

then learning from them," says Bob Brame, agronomist with the USGA's Mid-Atlantic Region. "Each facet of a golf course maintenance program overlaps and ties in with all the other components."

Individual trouble spots need to be identified, evaluated and considered individually before they are combined with others as a package.

Brame lists the following, "Second 10" pitfalls of golf course maintenance.

Time on the course. Few superintendents have the time or take the time to walk their golf courses daily to closely observe turf conditions. Not because they don't want to, but because they are pulled in too many different directions.

While superintendents agree that they are spending more time on the job, less time is actually spent on the golf course.

Superintendents need to play their courses once a week, or at least walk the course regularly. The industry can't afford to lose sight of the fact that golf course maintenance is still a hands-on profession.

Documentation. Record keeping ranges from very good to non-existent in golf course maintenance operations. With today's pesticide regulations, however, it's important to record every detail leading to and including the decision to actually apply a chemical.

Bandwagon. Before you copy what the "leading" course in town is doing, take the time to see if the method is agronomically sound for your course. Find out whether any university testing has been done in that area to suggest that it will work equally well at most sites.

Marking the course. Know the rules, stay current with changes and mark the course properly.

Lack of outside interests. To avoid burnout, take time off from making your

course the "perfect" course. Pursue a non-golf related interest.

Test plots. The value of on-course testing cannot be overstated. Every golf course maintenance operation should have at least one turf nursery in which to perform controlled evaluations.

Leave control strips when making applications to determine the efficacy of a product.

New technology. Attend local, regional, national and even international educational conferences, field days and seminars.

Read industry magazines and publications.

Long-range planning. A well-devised



The Top 20 Pitfalls

(Superintendent sins of commission or omission)

- Poor communications and public relations.
- Overwatering.
- Fast green speeds.
- Excessive use of pesticides.
- Continuity of course officials/green chairperson.
- Pesticide storage and/or maintenance buildings.
- Tree management.
- Amount of play.
- Labor: not enough and/or underqualified.
- Equipment: not enough and/or poor quality.
- Time on the course.
- Documentation.
- Jumping on the bandwagon.
- Marking the course.
- Lack of outside interests.
- Test plots.
- New technology.
- Long-range planning.
- Training and delegating.
- Managing carts and paths.

master plan, approved by management can help bridge the gap in continuity when superintendents or course officials change. A good master plan may also increase the longevity of the current superintendent because there is a good idea of what is expected and where the operation is headed.

Training and delegation. If you have a pager, cellular phone or two-way radio in constant use, maybe it's time to spread some responsibility to other key employees. A good rule of thumb is to train key employees to do everything you do. Don't be insecure.

Managing carts and paths. A well-built golf cart path offers the best wear control and maintenance options where heavy cart traffic exists. While no one likes the idea of having a paved surface on the golf course, serious thought should be given to current and future use of carts on your course.