

# GOLF & ATHLETIC

## TURF

### Last-ditch rescue tips for ailing greens

**USGA Green Section official reveals simple strategies for helping heat/humidity stressed greens stay alive.**

■ Several weeks of unrelenting heat and humidity took their toll on greens in the northeast this past summer. The once-in-10-year conditions didn't damage all greens, nor even a majority. A declining green or two on a course was not an unusual sight, though.

Some superintendents lost jobs because of it.

"When one or two greens die, the membership wonders what did you do to these and not the others," said Robert C. Vavrek, Jr., USGA Green Section. "It was hard to explain."

A variety of conditions predispose a green for failure under unrelenting heat and humidity, Vavrek told about 300 superintendents at the North Central Turf Conference near Chicago.

The location of a green, shielded either by a hillside or surrounded by trees, may put it in jeopardy. Air movement is limited. Disease pressure increases.

Also, layering—either through improper construction or maintenance—is not such an uncommon problem. Cores taken

from a suffering green will reveal this.

"There's a layer somewhere and the water is not moving through the soil profile," Vavrek said.

Until recently he traveled the Great Lakes Region for the USGA. Because of a 1994 realignment, he now works from Michigan to Montana.

In talking to superintendents who kept their greens playable—and membership relatively satisfied—Vavrek offered these pointers for rescuing greens during periods of unusual heat and humidity stress:

- **Fans on the green**, or removing several trees can offer short-term help.

- **Put away** the triplex mower and use a walking mower.

"You see it time and time again, golf courses spending money on fungicides and hiring an extra person, but they won't buy one or two walkers to have on hand for an emergency," said Vavrek.

- **Turn off** the automatic irrigation system. Keep the green on the dry side. Hand water as much as possible. Quoting from a 50-year-old brochure from the Canadian Golf Course Association, Vavrek said: "More grass is killed by overwatering than by underwatering it."

- **Aerify, spike** or use the Hydroject. "If I had one (Hydroject) I would be using it a lot," he commented, perhaps even on a 7-to-10-day schedule on a heat/humidity-stressed green.

- **Consider applying** "a very very low rate" of nitrogen—perhaps an organic source—and phosphorus from a spray tank.

Trying to solve the problem with successive applications of fungicides and fertilizer is unwise, said Vavrek.

Better to keep your greens rescue "very, very simple."

—Ron Hall



**Don't get fancy when trying to save a green, advises Robert Vavrek, Jr.**



Use low rates of nitrogen on stressed golf greens to help save them.

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