

# Last-ditch rescue tips for ailing greens

*A 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 last 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 1994 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.

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 sys-

tem. 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."

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

Successive applications of fungicides and fertilizer is unwise, said Vavrek. "Keep it simple." □

## Spoon-feeding, higher cuts save the day in Washington, D.C.

Steve Hilbun's tenure as superintendent for the East Potomac Golf Course began in June, and the summer heat made his employment a certain baptism under fire.

Hand-syringing was one remedy against turf wilt. The bad news was that greens monitoring became a 12-hour-a-day job.

"You'd get here around 4:30 a.m., be here till 7 or 7:30 p.m., for one to three days a week," says Hilbun.

"I would not rely on the automatic irrigation system alone," says Hilbun, who knew the importance of in-person monitoring.

"I would use it for 10 minutes early in the morning, depending on the temperature. There was also some evening watering, for about 10 minutes at 8 or 9 p.m. And we watched for any fungus that may have been activated by water being on the greens overnight."

Hilbun also relied on organic fertilizers—usually in half-pound applications—

during the heatwave, and Aqua-Gro wetting agent tablets.

Milorganite (6-2-0 analysis) and another 22-00-16 fertilizer were applied.

Hilbun tried the Peters 20-20-20, water-soluble nitrogen solution at a rate of 1/10 lb./1000 sq. ft.

Hilbun raised the mowing height on his Toro triplex units to 7/32-inch, from the usual 3/16 height, with—thankfully—no complaints from golfers.

When all was said and done, greens damage at East Potomac was minimal, with only a trace of brown patch and some anthracnose toward the end of the summer. There was no pythium damage, and dollar spot was held in check.

"We'd get some hot spots, but we did not lose any greens," reports Hilbun.

Hilbun is considering the use of wetting agents more in 1996.

The East Potomac course is a 36-hole layout: one 18-hole course and two nine-hole links. □