

Yarn # 28 Nov/Dec 2011

### The state of the industry

The last few years have been the toughest, roughest, most stressful and difficult years the sports turf industry has ever known. First the recession that started sometime in the year 2008 and continues today. In many parts of North America the recession in regards to employment and available recreational dollars is worse today [November – December 2011] than in the years 2008, 2009 and 2010. Most would agree that this difficult time has been ongoing for over three years and shows no signs of getting better in the near future.

Most golf courses and other recreational facilities have had to cut maintenance budgets from 10% to up to 40% during this period. On the maintenance side of the industry it is understood that cuts are necessary and most golf course superintendents and sports turf managers have adjusted and are doing a remarkable job with less funds, staff and other resources. I have visited over 200 different golf courses each year for the last 3 years during this difficult time and am amazed at the positive attitude at most facilities.

A year ago I wrote an article about a general manager of a golf course in the Midwest part of the United States. In that article I pointed out that one of his first actions as the new general manager of the course was to call a meeting of all of the department heads and in that meeting he informed them that “**they would each have to do a little more with a little less.**” I am still involved with this course on a regular basis and this mind set of doing a little more with a little less has been very successful and the moral of the staff and the club membership is steady at a very high level. This club has a staff from top to bottom of personnel that think and operate together in a calm rational manner and base their decisions on knowledge, science and experience.

In addition to recreational dollars being at an all time low, Mother Nature has been extremely cruel in many parts of North America and the rest of the world. We have had extreme moisture followed by heat that has set all time records and in some cases the moisture and heat have come at the same time. In other areas such as Texas we have had over 60 days of 100F+ temperatures and severe drought. As a result, the stress on bent grass facilities has never been greater. When the prolonged heat came in 2010 we were [in most cases] unprepared and we suffered from a tremendous amount of lost turf. **We learned from 2010 that in such heat induced stress conditions that our plants needed more air movement on the surface and more oxygen needed to be introduced to the root system.** With this firsthand knowledge gleamed from our experiences in 2010 we were better prepared for the heat and stress that came to us in 2011. In most cases the greens just needed better surface air movement and more oxygen in the root zones.

Courses that suffered severe damage in 2011 due to heat/moisture stress need to look at the physical properties of their soils as well as the soil chemistry, disease and insects. In 90% of the cases if science shows that our physical and chemical properties are acceptable and that we have no disease or insect issues and that our irrigation water is acceptable, than that only leaves tree root invasion, lack of oxygen in the root zone and or lack of air movement on the surface. Shade or lack of sun accounts for the other 9.0% of turf loss. I have no clue what would cause the other 1% of turf loss except for maybe equipment malfunction, or moisture barriers left in place to long in low lying areas around the green.

**WHEW,** there's more to this thing of having healthy greens, tees and fairways than one would first think.

THE STATE OF THE INDUSTRY IS WHAT IT IS AND IT'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE VERY QUICKLY. WE NEED TO LEARN FROM THE PAST AND IMPROVE OUR SURROUNDINGS AND OUR FUTURE BASED ON SCIENCE AND COMMON SENSE.

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