

Testing Greens When They Are Healthy Is A Must

By Dave Doherty

Fifteen years ago most greens testing was done on stressed greens, because as an industry we've always been **reactive** instead of **proactive** when it comes to the turf care of our golf greens.

We'd wait for the greens to stress before trying to find out where they were deficient, and in what areas they were deficient... mostly on the chemical side of the equation.

Back then I'd be asked if the physical properties of a green were causing the turf problems.

Without knowing the physical properties before the turf began to stress, it was in many cases very hard to give an answer.

If we had been able to quantify the physical properties when the greens were healthy it would have been a much more useful answer when we tested the greens in a stressed condition, and we'd be much more comfortable with our answer.

Fifteen years later we're starting to be proactive.

In January 2012, two members of the ISTRC staff and I visited the U.S. Gulf Coast area armed with two camera snakes and multiple probes with enlarged tips to locate drain tile clean outs and drains and to check the condition of drain tiles.

Before our journey began each of the four courses we were to visit submitted samples for physical property testing, and with the physical property reports in hand the meetings with course superintendents, general managers and other course officials were very productive.

We worked out an aerification and venting program based on science and each individual course's needs. In each instance we located clean outs and outfalls enabling us to inject oxygen into the root zones.

About three years before our current visit we had performed physical property analysis on the greens at one of the courses. By having access to the 2010 physical properties and comparing them to the 2012 results we were able to see the changes and make recommendations based entirely on science.

The course superintendent, in complete agreement with the recommendations, started on a new program immediately, involving more than just a change in the displacement of organic matter this coming year.

It was a most gratifying trip because of the opportunity to work alongside the staffs of the different courses and share our knowledge, as we learned first-hand the issues faced everyday by not only the grounds crew but also the challenges faced by management.

By being proactive, by quantifying physical properties when our greens are healthy and doing well, we can do a much better job of identifying the changes in our greens when they are stressed, allowing us to address the situation in the most economically way, based on science.

Dave Doherty is CEO and founder of the International Sports Turf Research Center, Inc. (ISTRC) and holds three patents regarding the testing of sand and soil-based greens. He can be reached at (913) 706-6635 or via email: daveistrc@hotmail.com

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