

TURF TWISTERS

IT IS GOOD PRACTICE

Question: Can the winter heave/thaw cycle kill grass plants? (New Jersey)

Answer: Yes, especially young ones. During normal freeze/thaw winter cycles the grass plant can literally be pushed from the soil by the expansion and contraction of the ground. This action can sever roots or elevate the plant, making it more susceptible to desiccation. When this condition is apparent, it is good practice early in the spring to roll the ground lightly to force the grass crown back into contact with the soil.

TO CLOSE ONE COURSE

Question: We have a 36-hole facility. Is it common practice to keep all 36 holes open to play during winter or is it best to keep only 18 of our 36 holes open? (Delaware)

Answer: Much depends upon the amount of play each course receives. If winter play is minimal, then very definitely it would pay to center all play on one course. When this is done, our experience indicates that the grass on the course that is closed for the winter becomes denser, undamaged roots are deeper, weeds and diseases are less troublesome and the putting surfaces are smoother the following year than the course that was played all winter. Obviously, it would pay to alternate courses for winter play annually at a 36-hole facility.

TO PREVENT WINTER DAMAGE

Question: Our golf course superintendent prohibits play when there is frost on the ground. Is this good practice and if so, why? (Ohio)

Answer: When turfgrass plants with a frost cover experience foot or vehicular traffic, permanent damage frequently occurs because walls of plant cells are ruptured. Also, it is possible that the crown of the plant may be damaged, which could result in permanent turf loss. A weakened plant provides an ideal opportunity for weed and disease invasion and a decrease in plant density for the summer stress months. The golf course superintendent has the interest of the majority of players in mind, and he is interested in the maximum use of the course for all seasons when he faces the decision to close the course because of inclement weather.