

'Hi Tech' Can't Replace 'Common Sense'

by JAMES F. MOORE

Director, Mid-Continent Region, USGA Green Section

AN EFFECTIVE MEANS of illustrating the science and industry of golf course management to green chairmen, club presidents, and other club officials is to invite them to attend the annual GCSAA conference and trade show. Invariably they are amazed at the size of the show and by the diversity of products on display.

To them, it must appear that to develop a great golf course, all one must do is buy enough equipment, an assortment of chemicals, and, of course, at least one computer that claims to do everything but change the water in the ball washers.

Although it is certainly beneficial for the laymen to learn more about turfgrass in this manner, I feel many of those who attended left with a dangerous concept of turf management: They may believe one can cookbook the management of a golf course. If they believe this strongly enough, they will logically assume the superintendent's main job is merely assembling and maintaining the various gizmos the club buys.

Such a dependence and false confidence in hi tech is a poor substitute for common sense.

So, the turf tips I have gathered together for this year involve common sense turfgrass management. The superintendents from whom the tips have come have found simple low-tech solutions to difficult problems.

Ball Marks

Bob Kinder is the superintendent at Rolling Hills Country Club, in Wichita, Kansas. This club consistently has some of the best bentgrass greens in my 10-state region. With such excellent greens, you would expect putting quality to be wonderful. Instead, the greens were often bumpy and unpredictable because they were pocked with unrepaired ball marks.

To illustrate this problem to the membership, Bob chose a low-tech but effective solution. White golf tees were placed in every unrepaired or improperly repaired ball mark. He took photographs and posted them in the locker rooms and the golf shop, and had them placed in the club's newsletter. It proved to be an effective teaching tool.

Irrigation Control

Nowhere is hi tech more prominent than in irrigation, but all the computers in the world will only be as effective as the design and location of the sprinkler heads. Ironically, turfgrass breeders have complicated irrigation a great deal. Because of improved turfgrasses, many superintendents maintain cool-season turfs immediately adjacent to warm-season grasses.

If you water strictly according to the needs of the cool-season green, the

adjacent warm-season turfs become drought stressed. This is also true in areas where cool-season turfs surround cool-season greens but are maintained at much higher cutting heights.

If you water according to the needs of the perimeters, you can easily overwater the green itself, and we all know this must be avoided at all costs.

While watering these areas manually would use a lot of manpower, it is one low-tech solution. For a simple, more cost-effective solution, install a perimeter irrigation system. The superintendent can then precisely meet the irrigation needs of the green and the surrounding turf areas regardless of differences in species or cutting heights.

Isolated Hot Spots

Isolated hot spots have plagued superintendents for years. Roger Schmitt, at the Country Club of Paducah, Kentucky, came up with a low-tech solution that has worked extremely well.

He uses a piece of pipe, a hand valve, a hose, and a plastic plate to gently force water into the localized dry area without overwatering the remainder of the green. Water is applied deeply and exactly to the area where it is needed.

Hi tech has an important place, and it will continue to help us do a better job, assuming we combine it with good old-fashioned common sense.

White tees graphically illustrate ball marks.



"Outgoing" perimeter irrigation.

