

# Turf Twisters

**Q:** What is a reasonable number of people to keep on our maintenance staff during the winter months? We are in a northern, seasonal climate and are always watching our budget. (Wyoming)

**A:** This question is commonly asked of superintendents by members of the Green Committee or Board of Directors, particularly when there is snow on the ground and the budget is tight. Most 18-hole golf courses located in the northern U.S. keep an average of 3-4 employees in addition to the mechanic

and superintendent during the winter to perform annual maintenance on equipment, monitor conditions across the golf course, remove snow from roads and parking areas, and handle golf course setup duties when conditions warrant winter play. An exact number depends upon specific requirements, including extensive snow plowing,

accumulating debris from trees, etc., when the course is open to play, and any in-house projects. Some courses are fortunate to have talented staff that can conduct in-house improvement projects to the golf course or grounds, resulting in significant savings to the club.

**Q:** Our members have heard that there are different setup criteria used for bunkers being prepared for a championship. Is this true? (Virginia)



**A:** Bunker preparation for USGA championships has evolved over the years. Keep in mind that bunkers are hazards, and a challenge

should be presented when attempting a recovery shot. There is nothing in the Rules of Golf stating that a bunker needs to be prepared in any particular manner. For our championships, the sand in the bunkers is packed with a mechanical bunker rake, using only the tires of the machine. Every attempt is made to eliminate ridges

in the surface of the bunker. The sand is then hand-raked with a leaf rake that creates a soft condition, allowing for the possibility of a cuppy lie in the bunker. Balls do not often bury, but they may not always sit up on the sand. There is no such thing as a perfect bunker — only perfect golf shots!

**Q:** Greens on our golf course experienced ice damage last winter. A group of us play at another course where they use covers to protect all their greens from ice. We believe they would be effective at our course as well, but our superintendent disagrees and feels we would be better off spending our money in other ways. What do you think? (Massachusetts)

**A:** If the covers under consideration are the standard permeable woven materials, they have many uses, including protecting against desiccation and hastening spring green-up. But they will not prevent cold temperature freeze injury (“ice damage”). Various types of non-permeable covers and insulating

materials are utilized to a greater extent to prevent winter freeze injury, and they may be worth considering if the winter damage continues or becomes more severe on your greens. There are no easy answers to winter problems, as we are often at the mercy of the weather. It is a good idea to have a few

covers available to promote recovery in the spring should it be necessary. However, follow your superintendent’s advice and use the money instead to eliminate fall and winter shade and improve surface drainage.

