

VERIFY

Don't entrust your career to what others may say alone; establish and monitor control plots to verify a product's usefulness and value.

BY BOB BRAME

It's amazing how seldom control plots are seen during site visits to golf courses. This ultimately means it is amazing how blindly some people rely on others to verify a product's usefulness and value. Clearly, the initial process of deciding to try a product comes from groups and individuals within our industry. This may include superintendents, sales representatives, university extension/research personnel, company tech representatives, or your Green Section agronomist. Yet, the initial favorable comments or testimonials from others should not be the enduring mantra. Establishing and closely monitoring untreated areas or check plots is the only way to verify a product's worth in your specific maintenance program at your particular location.

By definition, *verify* means "to establish the truth or correctness of, by examination or demonstration." The work done by companies to bring a product to market sets the stage for how it will be used and what it can offer. In fact, the research and development phase establishes parameters for usage that are spelled out on the product label. Even though significant time and funding are invested to bring a product to market, there is no way to account for site-specific variables, which includes weather patterns, and for all aspects of an individual maintenance program to be fully integrated into the recommended usage found on the label. There is no question that establishing and monitoring control plots takes time, but they offer the only way to



Establishing a control plot can be as easy as laying out a sheet of plywood prior to making an application. The corners should be carefully marked so that accurate repositioning is possible prior to all subsequent treatments.

determine if a product is safe and effective for your operation.

Beyond safety, using a product that hasn't been verified with site-specific control plots may actually compromise the environment. Applying a mix of fungicides, as an example, when one will provide the needed protection is less than good environmental stewardship. Conversely, utilizing a single product when a combination is necessary to fully control the pest(s) may force subsequent applications that could have been avoided with a properly fitted initial treatment. Check plots can improve environmental stewardship.

In addition to safety and environmental stewardship, site-specific control plots make it possible to verify a product's value. There will be a promise of value when the product is initially purchased (it's called "sales"), but is there an actual return on the investment? Buying the most expensive product or a pre-mixed combina-

tion of several ingredients doesn't necessarily mean there is added value in your program. Sometimes less is more when considering the full scope of your agronomic program and budget efficiency.

Along with enhanced agronomics/safety, environmental stewardship, and good economy, credibility is elevated when control plots are utilized to guide the maintenance operation. The initial purchase and use of a product is one thing, but continuing to use something in your program that isn't safe or environmentally friendly and/or a proven value is something altogether different. The old

adage applies: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." Being able to review and discuss control plots with owners, course officials, the park board, etc., will elevate your credibility, even if they don't fully understand the details.

Taking the time to establish and monitor control plots is a win-win proposition. The overall efficiency of your agronomic program is maximized and the environmental friendliness of the property is elevated. Your budget dollars are better fitted, and the enhanced credibility serves to strengthen communication and overall operational efficiency. So invest the time to establish, monitor, and rely on site-specific control plots as an ongoing standard operating procedure — it's the right thing to do and verification will pay dividends.

BOB BRAME joined the Green Section staff in 1990 following 18 years as a golf course superintendent.