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(environment)

Water responsibility

Among the most important issues facing the future of golf is water use. In some parts of the country, courses require large amounts of water to irrigate the landscape. For several decades, the golf industry has recognized its responsibility to reduce water use and become less reliant on potable irrigation sources. This multi-faceted approach includes development of:

- New grass varieties that use less water or can tolerate poor-quality water
- New technologies that improve the efficiency of irrigation systems
- Best management practices in course maintenance that result in less water use
- Alternate water sources to reduce or eliminate use of potable water
- Design concepts to minimize area maintained with grasses requiring less water
- Educational programs for golf course superintendents about water conservation

The real facts about golf course water use

- 92 percent use wetting agents to aid in water retention and efficiency
- 83 percent report protection of water wells
- 78 percent use hand-watering techniques for increased precision
- 65 percent report upgrades to irrigation systems
- 15 percent utilize municipal water supplies

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Water-conscious and responsible

It's March, and for some organizations and individuals, there is a major focus on water because National Groundwater Awareness Week is the 9th through 15th and World Water Day is the 22nd. These events are important because they promote awareness, conservation and water-quality protection. We know that many golf course superintendents and others in the industry are already on point in regard to efficient and effective water management. However, what do many individuals outside our golf-centric group know about water management on golf courses? Also, should our efforts stop here or continue?

Both of these events provide opportunities to demonstrate water management practices, educate stakeholders and commit to continuous improvement. Consider the information from the We Are Golf website in the sidebar.

This message is important, and we can further demonstrate our current efforts as well as our commitment to continuous improvement. Environmental programs like the Groundwater Foundation's Groundwater Guardian Green Site Program, Audubon International, eParUSA, Golf Environment Organization and others provide the means to help document, demonstrate and communicate efforts at individual golf facilities. They provide the platform for continuous improvement.

What's the value of investing time and resources in such a program? Brett Hetland, CGCS at Brooks Golf Course in Okoboji, Iowa, explains that, "a value of participating in the Groundwater Guardian Green Site Program and with Audubon International is marketing, promoting our best management practices, demonstrating environmental stewardship and documenting the work we are doing."

Hetland's facility is located in the "Great Lakes Region of Iowa" where there are seven watershed groups and a constant awareness of environmental issues, especially water management. Being proactive and working with watershed groups and regulatory agencies helps to achieve success. "It is better to be proactive than reactive to regulations that will be enforced," states Hetland, a 19-year member of GCSAA.

Like many superintendents, Hetland worked on the facility's irrigation system, reduced irrigation of non-play areas, and initiated hand watering to help ensure efficiency. Initially, he estimates that they reduced water use by 5-10 percent, but he didn't stop there. They installed variable-frequency drives on the pumps and updated one pump station to improve efficiency. They reduced their irrigation run time by four hours, which also conserves energy.

When the course added nine new holes, they implemented a wetland system that collects the backwash water from a nearby water tower and collect about 45 acre-feet a year for irrigation. The nine new holes do have a water well, which has the appropriate protection practices in place as well. Incorporating design, best management practices and technology has helped with water management at the facility.

Hetland implemented a drought contingency plan, which he later supplemented with the Iowa GCSA's drought plan. This drought plan was a cooperative effort between the Iowa GCSA and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Water Supply Division. This three-stage restriction plan is ready and in place when necessary.

These efforts, as well as others (like those undertaken by the Georgia GCSA), demonstrate how being proactive can help facilities even before they are faced with drought or water restrictions. Facilities that demonstrate and communicate their efforts and commitment do help the golf course industry as well as themselves. The value of these efforts may have an economic return on investment as well as a long-term return for the image of the game.

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