

CLOSING FOR MAINTENANCE

Closing the course on Mondays is not the only option for performing major maintenance.

by MIKE HUCK

SUPERINTENDENTS are first to realize that their courses would benefit if only there were more time to get things done without interruption from play. There is no doubt that occasionally closing the golf course for maintenance can make a difference in course conditioning. Routine closures allow for important maintenance practices like topdressing, pest control, aeration, fertilization, drainage projects, and irrigation improvements to be performed in a timely manner. Staying on schedule with these maintenance programs, combined with one day of rest for the course each week, helps immensely to provide optimum turf conditions, especially in climates where golf is played 52 weeks a year.

Golfers do not always see it this way. They want their course available every possible day, and they offer various arguments against regular course closure. They often chant, "We can't afford it!" or "Our members would never approve it." But in the year 2000, course operators need to ask themselves if they can realistically afford not to close the course or at the very least do some creative scheduling to allow uninterrupted maintenance for specific reasons, including:

- **Pest Control Applications:** Re-entry restrictions for chemical applications are becoming increasingly strict. Current regulations in some areas require pesticide applications to be watered in (when required by the label) or sprays to be dry to the touch before anyone without protective clothing may re-enter treated areas. During humid, overcast, or foggy conditions, this can require several hours or possibly an entire day to dry adequately. Future regulations could go as far as requiring a 12- to 24-hour re-entry interval following chemical

applications. In other words, there may soon be no escaping the need for course closure in order to apply pest controls.

- **Leaching and Poor Water Quality:**

The increased use of recycled and other non-potable water sources containing high salt loads requires occasional leaching. This is necessary to keep soluble salts from accumulating in the soil and causing turfgrass stress. Placing traffic on soft, over-irrigated greens immediately following leaching increases soil compaction and disrupts surface smoothness, thereby affecting putting quality. This problem can be avoided by leaching greens the evening before course closure and allowing the next entire day for the soil to drain and return to a more reasonable firmness before traffic is allowed.

- **Satisfying Increasing Expectations:**

It is easy to understand the golfers' desire to use their facilities as much as possible; however, the increased traffic can also compromise course conditioning. As an example, opening a course on Mondays in a climate where golf is played 52 weeks a year can result in a significant increase in play. Excluding the five typically observed Monday holidays, opening the remaining Mondays could increase traffic by 7,000 rounds or more each year. As difficult as it already is to satisfy rising expectations for top-quality playing conditions, the additional traffic can only make things worse!

Public and daily-fee facilities often believe they cannot afford a shutdown, but creative scheduling may help set aside time for maintenance. Private courses that host outside tournaments on Mondays to supplement income often schedule these as shotgun starts beginning at noon or later, with no early morning tee times. This allows the maintenance staff a few

precious hours prior to the tournament to perform jobs that are better done without the interruption of play. With advanced planning, a municipal or daily-fee course could regularly schedule a shotgun start on a day that historically has proven to be less busy, thus allowing morning maintenance. Once the regular patrons are educated on the reasoning behind such a program and begin to see improved conditioning, they should support it entirely.

Another program that some courses in northern and mountain regions utilize is the regular scheduling of a "maintenance evening" during the longer days of summer. The first tee is closed at or shortly after noon on that particular day, allowing the staff to work uninterrupted following play. The benefit of this program is that it still accommodates players with early morning tee times, which they typically prefer.

Accommodating play around major maintenance operations is an ongoing challenge, and courses that have given up maintenance days to satisfy players tend to find it very difficult, if not impossible, to ever reverse the policy. As a final point of consideration, course officials must remember that it is their duty to serve the majority of the players and, in the long run, a greater number of golfers benefit from occasional closures than are inconvenienced.

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