



WATER

Ray Burniston examines the role of water on the golf course following a recent seminar organised by The R&A Advisory Panel and the EGU.

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This was the title of a seminar organised jointly by the R&A Advisory Panel and the English Golf Union at the Berkshire College of Agriculture during November. The policy of the R&A Advisory Panel is to take areas of the golf course in which they feel there is a need for clubs to be aware of future problems. The seminar in which eight speakers covered all aspects of using water on a golf course brought home to those attending that we could face serious problems in the future.

The first paper from Gwyn Williams of the Environment Agency (EA), highlighted the future policy which may effect golf clubs. In 1997 central Government decided on a ten-point plan to combat the problems experienced by drought conditions during the 1970's & 80's. This included a review of licences and the use of the environment. Future climate changes would have to be taken into account and a more co-operative approach would be made.

In future all licences would have a time limit and a 15-year programme would be started to convert existing licences. Action would be taken by the EA to curb licences that they considered damaging to the environment.

There would be some form of deregulation for small abstractions and any significant exempt abstractions would be controlled. There would be changes to the status of all existing licences. Time limiting of licences would be introduced because of increasing demand for water, expectations of changes to the environment and projected climate change. All new licences issued would have a time limit with a presumption of renewal based on continuing need, efficient use and environmental acceptability. Existing permanent licences would be converted to a time limit status. There would however be a voluntary approach to change in the first instance. All licences would have a normal 12-year renewal period but there would be provision for shorter or longer duration in special circumstances.

There would be a common end date principle linked to "Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies" CAMS. The whole of England and Wales would be covered and reviewed every 6 years looking at areas of overuse and setting a policy for management abstraction. It was anticipated that applying CAMS to England & Wales would initially take between 6 to 8 years to complete. The EA would have powers to take action in cases of abstraction causing or contributing to the damaging of the environment. Initially a voluntary approach would be sought

before the EA used their statutory powers. The EA would publish a list of sites for action each year. In the case of a non-renewal of a licence, 6 years notice would be given and a similar notice would be given to any significant changes required. After 2012 there would be no compensation for the non-renewal of a damaging licence and the removal of the defence against third party action. By then licences would no longer be linked to land.

Clubs will need to make sure that their water management policy is reviewed regularly so that when their licence is due for renewal they have no problems. It is quite possible that in areas in which water is already in short supply the use of irrigation for fairways may come under investigation and may not be considered necessary. The long-term storage of sufficient amounts of water for use on the course will be essential as the cost of taking water via the mains may become prohibitive.

In many cases, clubs will need to monitor carefully their water resources and make the necessary provisions for the future. If we experience a drought as severe as the one we had in 1976, it is doubtful that clubs in some areas would be able to continue to draw water from the mains. Given the massive increase generally in water consumption, the areas most affected could cover the South East, London, East Anglia and Southern England including the South West. So provision for the storage of water will be essential in many parts of the country. Existing boreholes may either dry up in drought conditions or you may be unable to use this facility.

The next speaker, Dr Tim Lodge of the STRI, spoke of the ever present problem of overwatering. Despite the crusade of people like Jim Arthur there are still clubs that put pressure on their greenkeepers to overwater because members cannot stop a ball on the greens. The menace of creating excessive thatch is always there and constant maintenance must be carried out. However modern irrigation systems have the technology to be far more exact on the amount of water that is distributed than in previous generations.

Philip York followed up with a talk on the latest developments and stressed the need to have independent advice rather than accept everything the manufactures claim. Before spending vast capital sums on irrigation, clubs are well advised to consider all the options.

Richard Glass, Pesticide Team Leader from Central Science Laboratories, warned delegates that the use of pesticides would be more difficult in the future. This is because many pesticides used today would eventually be banned. Therefore the good management of grass was essential. In the future correcting a problem by using the appropriate pesticide would not be possible.

Dr Keith Duff, from English Nature, spoke on 'Water and the Ecology' and stressed that his organisation wished to work with golf clubs. Over recent years a very good relationship with the industry had built up. If clubs had a problem on ecology they would receive valuable help and advice from English Nature.

David Shelton representing Sportsturf Drainage Solutions, gave several examples of how drainage in what had seemed permanent wet areas had been drastically improved by using modern technology and equipment. In addition new improved materials were on the market.

Also if gravel is used to assist drainage, then round gravel is better than crushed gravel. He passed round samples of Lytag, which is a unique lightweight aggregate having several advantages over the conventional permeable fill materials.

The Course Manager of nearby Temple Golf Club, Martin Gunn, gave a talk on how his club had pursued a policy of reducing consumption by installing the very latest systems and technology. This had dramatically improved the condition of the greens over the years and he felt many clubs needed to go down this particular road. Again he stressed the importance of getting good independent advice.

Following this, David Williams, from the European Institute of Golf Course Architects, gave an interesting and informative talk on water storage as a course feature. Generally architects were not in favour of building ponds and reservoirs on the course, using them as a feature as well as for water storage. In times of drought and high water usage they could become totally dry. However he conceded in certain cases it might be necessary to combine the two functions and he stressed the need for very careful design.

Peter White spoke on the need for prudent water management. Much of his experience had been abroad in countries such as Portugal. He stressed that the aims of water management were to improve golf course playing quality, improve environmental considerations, save water, improve fertiliser use efficiency, and improve herbicide/pesticide use efficiency. He suggested that this could be done by a combination of three factors: by using good decision support technology as well as training to use and interpret the data collected, in conjunction with improving water infiltration using modern wetting agents correctly.

George Brown, the Course Manager at Turnberry, summed up the day's events in his usual humorous style. Although the basics of greenkeeping still held good, we all had to adapt to modern technology and equipment. The use of pesticides/herbicides would decrease over the years and clubs would have to live with this.

Michael Barrett of the R&A made all the arrangements and in his quiet professional manner made certain all the speakers kept within their brief.

I came away knowing far more about water and its use than I have managed to obtain in previous years. There is little doubt that water use will be a major factor affecting all golf clubs in the future. Both clubs and secretaries who neglect to have a sound water and environmental policy in the future do so at their own peril. I was disappointed at the number of last minute cancellations by those who had registered to attend. It is vital that secretaries, club officials and greenkeepers attend seminars such as this to keep up with the latest developments.