

# Waste not, WANT NOT

How **more efficient** irrigation can **save your golf course thousands**

**RAIN BIRD**

**A**s a golf club manager, keeping golfers and visitors happy inevitably means you're juggling a dozen different operational priorities at any one time. And money management is one of the trickier aspects, even if you have a treasurer managing your cash flow and tightly controlling your budget.

Although irrigation appears relatively straightforward on the face of it, simply controlling the application of water to achieve the optimum playing surface, managing it more efficiently can present challenges. According to the European Institute Golf Course Architects, without efficient irrigation, fairways and greens are typically overwatered by 30 to 50 percent.

As well as the agronomic impact of inefficient irrigation, especially overwatering, there's also the impact on your club's stakeholders – golfers. The aim of improving irrigation efficiency has to be centred on creating and sustaining top quality playing surfaces that deliver the best experience possible.

Courses have significant opportunities to save money by using water, energy, equipment and staff resources more wisely, with a change in emphasis. Typically, the ins and outs of course irrigation are managed by your head greenkeeper or course manager, responsible for all the hard work that goes on day to day, keeping your greens and fairways in the best condition possible.

But let's take a fresh look at irrigation in the broader context of the club as a business and how you could begin to be more effective in monitoring, managing and reducing repair and running costs.

## **Irrigation System Performance**

A good start is your course manager who can help you get a detailed understanding of the potential of your system and linked controls in place.

- How much does irrigation cost your club each year?

Having robust business metrics means measuring costs and working out where efficiencies could be made. An alternative approach, measuring in

millimetres rather than minutes, combined with new technologies that respond in real time to changing weather conditions, is current best practice.

- What do you spend on preventative maintenance and upgrades?

Is there a planned approach to maintenance or does repair and replacement only tend to happen when something breaks down?

- How does the club measure water used and electricity used to power systems?

Would having a separate meter for water or for powering your irrigation system enable you to more accurately measure consumption?

- What is your approach to risk management and disaster planning?

Have you planned for any unforeseen or unusual weather events such as system failure, drought or water source disruption? What might future-proofing involve?

- How can new technologies drive irrigation system efficiencies?

Many systems are not being used fully and have a raft of features. If your software's working harder for you, staff time and expertise can be given over to other priorities.

- What new technology and best practice could benefit us and save time and money?

As technology and business practices change, how does your course manager find out what's new when it comes to getting more from your system? Look out for CPD and training events about improving irrigation system efficiency.

## **Innovation and Best Practice**

If you've first understood the current operational capability of your irrigation system, you

can then turn your attention to best practice and future cost efficiencies. As technology advances, being more precise and scientific gives the course manager the opportunity to reduce overwatering and any associated costs.

Alastair Higgs, Golf Sales Specialist at Rain Bird Europe says, "Every golf course manager wants to achieve the best possible playing surfaces. With the latest irrigation and control technologies, it's all about simplicity of installation, maintenance and ease of use. Next generation irrigation systems combine computer-aided design with GPS geo-referenced images and state-of-the-art ET-based scheduling which

reacts instantly to changes in the weather and field activity. With training and support, they really are easy to install and use."

Course irrigation is actually a more complex subject that it looks, involving a costly combination of equipment, products, people, water and energy. Maintaining high quality surfaces without wasting water, energy or nutrients, merits a closer look. Chances are there'll be a good payoff.

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