

SURVEY INDICATES ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDIZATION NEEDED

In a recent survey conducted by the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), 39 out of 40 firms reported that they had experienced difficulties in obtaining permits for golf course projects because of environmental concerns by local, state, or national agencies.

"This national survey vividly demonstrates the impact that environmental concerns have on the golf industry and the need for the industry to work with key agencies to develop mutually acceptable guidelines that will be interpreted uniformly throughout the country," said Dan Maples, ASGCA president.

Fifty-six percent of the firms surveyed cited wetlands as the primary problem they encountered during the permit process. Other areas of concern were habitat, nitrates and chemical contamination, groundwater protection, and pesticide usage.

The ASGCA survey also determined that new golf course projects have experienced the most delays because of objections by the Corp of Engineers. The Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources, various environmental groups, local planning commissions, town and city

councils, wildlife organizations, and adjacent landowners were ranked behind the Corp of Engineers in terms of causing delays.

More than half of the architectural firms that responded said some of their new projects had been delayed from eight to 12 months by the permit process. One-fourth said hearings delayed their projects by three to six months, while 22.5 percent said that several of their projects had been delayed from 15 to 30 months.

Delays represented far more than inconvenience to the firms and their clients. When asked to present actual case histories showing the costs of these delays, the architects cited additional costs ranging from \$10,000 to more than \$1 million. These changes came from additional financing, legal, and consultant fees, and from rerouting the project.

In general, respondents suggested that the golf industry develop a comprehensive informational program for agencies and interested environmental groups. Uniform interpretation guidelines should be worked out with national agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and

Corps of Engineers, which could then be used as parameters by local and state bodies, they said.

Maples pointed out that golf course architects are environmentalists by nature and training, and that nearly every ASGCA member has advised clients to back away from a project that could damage the environment. "However, we have not done a good job of explaining to regulatory agencies, local boards, and the general public how golf courses contribute to the quality of life," Maples said. "We must go one step further and work with the EPA and COE to develop guidelines that will help the architect prepare a plan that will be acceptable without a great deal of revision."

The key to that is having national standards on such key issues as wetland mitigation, Maples said. "We need to prepare good preliminary plans that are readily understandable to the laymen who sit on many of the local boards," he added. "We must become allies, not adversaries."

The ASGCA is sharing the results of its survey with other golf associations in hopes that a meeting can be set up in the near future with key regulatory agencies.

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