Recovering turf from severe weather

Editor's note: *This is a report from several regions around the country on how turf managers handle their turf in the wake of some severe weather in 2010.*

PENNSYLVANIA

SportsTurf: What is or was your worst problem this year due to the weather?

James F. Cornelius, CSFM, West Chester Area SD: Our worst problem was the extreme weather pattern; periods of either too much rain or lack of rain with hot dry weather played havoc on the athletic field turf. In the Northeast we dealt with high humidity and cool nights that provided the perfect environment for diseases.

ST: What did you do last fall (or are doing now) to solve the problem?

Cornelius: Knowing past history and making the correct or almost-correct guesses of future weather patterns was our biggest tool. In Fall 2009 we began our aeration program much earlier, we aerated more than usual, we fed our turf higher amount of slow release fertilizers and we over seeded all the fields heavier than ever, applying over 71,000 pounds of seed in order to thicken the turf and provide ample seed to reduce late season wear areas from the end users.

In the spring of 2010 we aggressively topdressed, applied more fertilizer and seed. Due to the users' schedules we were limited to irrigation until the middle of June when we were able to deep water the fields on a rotating basis in order to prevent an early dormancy.

Around the beginning of July we backed off the irrigation to allow the fields to go dormant during the high stress period and educated our users on protecting the turf from cleat injury, moving around the field areas to reduce wear areas and where possible we shut down fields and moved users to less significant fields at our elementary schools.

In the fall of 2010 we overseeded, applied fertilizers, and with the help of our users who consistently applied seed provided to goal mouth areas, filled divots, moved daily warm up routines around the field and more heavy aeration and deep slicing, we were able to recover the fields quickly. By the third week of the fall season the weather patterns became favorable and we took advantage of welcome rain storms.

ST: What do you plan on doing in the spring to continuing solving the problem?

Cornelius: From our experience we will attack the fields as early as possible. The cold weather has set in faster this year [Dec. 10] so the extra work that was done earlier in the fall will hopefully pay off. We have yet to make a decision on whether we will be using any grow tarps and with the early below freezing temperatures we may have missed that boat.

Our strength unlike most has proven to be in our educating the end users on field maintenance, field care and do's and don'ts. Once you educate and you communicate your plans and goals (providing they the end uses benefit as well) to them and you have a proven record it works it makes dealing with the extremes and the unknowns much easier.

IOWA

ST: What is or was your worst problem this year due to the weather?

Chris Schlosser, Iowa Cubs: I am not sure what our worst problem was—either the record snowfall and amount of time it covered the turf and a little snow mold problem in the spring, or one of the wettest years in history combined with heat, humidity and disease that occurred because of the constant rainfall and not being able to dry out completely.

These historic amounts of moisture led to a root problem of shallowing up and all our chemical applications never lasted for the proper intervals. The last

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Up here in the Pacific Northwest the 2010 summer was very uneventful, almost normal. We had cooler then average temps and average rainfall.

-Jason Moore, CSFM, Tualatin Hills Park & Rec, Beaverton, OR

problem was the amount of time the tarp was covering the field. The rain patterns were so incredible you had to start planning days in advance of an upcoming homestand to make sure you were covered because of rain and dry time leading up to and in games. We (the turf and grounds crew) just tried to survive and keep our sanity.

ST: What did you do last fall (or are doing now) to solve the problem?

Schlosser: After the tough year the rains shut off for pretty much all fall and we were able to stress the field and drive some roots down with normal practices. I did put one liquid snow mold application down and followed it up with a granular PCNB before we froze. Just trying to get a little more residual in the plant to last if we have another winter like last.

ST: What do you plan on doing in the spring to continuing solving the problem?

Schlosser: For 2011I am planning for the worst case scenario happening again. After the schedule was released we are trying to limit outside events and games so we have enough time to do our cultural practices, which were limited because of a high number of events last year. For chemical applications we are working them in more often and cutting down the interval cycle. We are usually on a 14-day preventive program and now I am looking at a 10-day because the breakthrough last occurred on that 9th or 10th day. Overall we didn't have any turf loss; what was damaged grew out of it and came back with normal practices.

OKLAHOMA

ST: What is or was your worst problem this year due to the weather?

Jeff Salmond, CSFM: The only problem was dealing with drought and not being able to water during the day. Any watering during the day, for example on a baseball infield, was done during lunch breaks, which is equivalent to a slight syringe. Throughout the whole summer, we had camps and clinics during the day and in the evenings because of the heat. The only time we were able to get sufficient water was at night. But we could not water too heavy as to make it wet for activities the next day. We also were not able to perform as many cultural practices, especially verticutting and aerification.

ST: What did you do last fall (or are doing right now) to solve the problem?

Salmond: We did more multiple needle-type aerifications, gypsum applications and a little heavier watering.

ST: What do you plan on doing in the spring to continuing solving the problem?

Salmond: We plan to use growth blankets to promote and initiate earlier turfgrass growth and build up moisture in our rootzones in anticipation of a warmer, drier spring and cooler, wetter summer. We also hope to change up any consistent wear patterns for turfgrass recovery. ■