FRIDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2018

Addressing Climate Change in Golf

One of my favorite things to do is a SWOT analysis. It's where you look inward and outward to address the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that you or your organization face. I do this almost continuously although I do a more formalize version every winter.

Back in 2011 one of the biggest threats to golf course operations was a cosmetic pesticide ban. From that time on I took the approach of trying to figure out how I could address this threat by figuring out

ways to reduce my reliance on pesticides. While the threat has lessened slightly, I am also less worried that I was back then because I took a proactive approach and learned a few things along the way. I still think there is value in taking this threat seriously though.

Another threat the golf industry faced over the past decade was the recession and financial difficulties. Again, I took the approach of finding solutions to this problem while sharing what I learned here.

In the coming decade I think the biggest threat to golf course operations will be climate change. You might think that it will be the warmer temperatures or the wildly variable weather your course might experience and these are very valid concerns. To me, though, the biggest threat surrounding climate change will be increased costs of fuel and equipment as stricter carbon taxes and regulation come into play.

It seems that in the last 6 months or so the urgency of climate change has intensified although it varies depending on who your government is. This adds another level to the threat. Things could drastically change depending on who is in power. One day you might be fine with your diesel burning mower and one day it might be illegal to use. That's an extreme example but the threat we face is also extreme.

Just like they tried to ban non-essential pesticides back in 2011, what if they try and ban non-essential fossil fuel uses in the near future?

If the price of fuel doubles in the next 5 years will your course be able to adapt?

If the cost and complexity of fossil fuel burning mowers increases even more will your course be able to adapt?

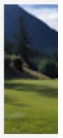
How big of an increase can your course manage without going out of business? If you are looking towards the future and take any possible threats seriously you need to know this figure. How much can you afford? At what point will you be forced to change or close the doors? Maybe you are already there as the cost of mowers is bordering on insane these days!

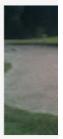
When we plan out our equipment plans we often look 5 to 10 years into the future. What does that future look like? With the recent pace of change your current plans might look a lot different than they did even a year ago.

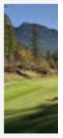
Just as I always have, I plan to take a proactive approach to this threat to my business. The first step is to investigate alternative ways to do our jobs without fossil fuels. I have already used battery powered string trimmers and 3 years later the machine and battery still work great for all but the thickest and heaviest of weed whacking jobs.

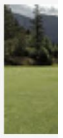
The second step is to try out and adapt the current technology to our needs. In my opinion there isn't yet a perfect solution but that will change as innovative superintendents get their hands on these new autonomous mowers.

I am extremely excited about the potential that small autonomous mowers will bring. They can mow relatively large areas with the current battery technology and don't require a huge investment to implement.









Hein van Iersel
@Heinvanlersel1

Video van all wheel drive Husqvarna robotmower

♡ 6 10:12 AM - Oct 9, 2018

See Hein van Iersel's other Tweets

They promise to solve a lot of the issues we face but the biggest threat they will help us manage is the threat of using fossil fuels to do our job because they are 100% electric. After learning how these mowers are successfully used in Europe already, I am no longer worried. I am excited for the future and challenge of golf course maintenance without fossil fuels.

If someone came to us tomorrow and said you can no longer use diesel or gasoline to maintain your golf course we would have a solution. It would take some creativity to implement but it would be possible and for relatively low costs.

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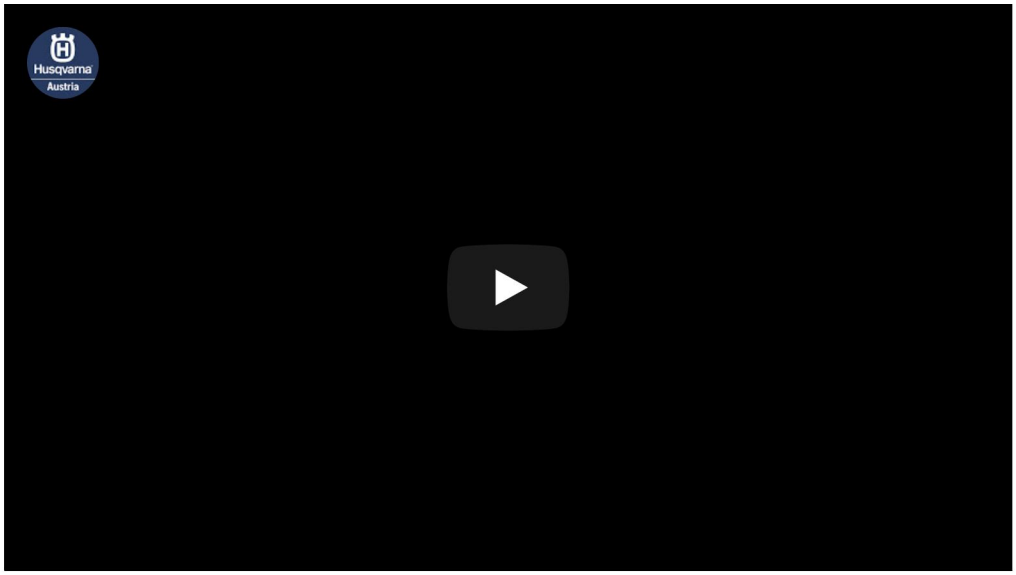

This blog has beat the threats of pesticide bans and tough economic circumstances almost to death. While I will continue to focus on these threats I think that it would be irresponsible to ignore the threat of climate change and how we can make the transition away from fossil fuels as painless as possible.

Implementing this at my new course probably won't happen as quickly as I would like but a neighbouring course (and hopefully my old course) will be trialing this technology in the new year and I will share everything we learn so that others can also get in early and do something about climate change in golf.

Posted by Jason Haines

Labels: climate change, robot mowers

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