Green Section Record

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Golf Course Maintenance Strategies To Limit The Spread Of COVID-19

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Many golf courses are making adjustments to hole liners in an effort to limit golfer contact with the hole .

The spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 throughout the world and here in the U.S. has caused dramatic disruptions to daily life. In an effort to help slow the spread, businesses from all sectors are adjusting practices to protect employees and customers. The same is true within the golf industry, where professional and amateur tournaments have been postponed and individual golf facilities are diligently altering their day-to-day operations in accordance with health official and government recommendations. These are uncertain times that require constant monitoring and proper precautions.

The USGA's consulting agronomists have been talking to a lot of superintendents and other golf course professionals during this crisis and have been hearing some strategies that courses have implemented to address the evolving health concerns surrounding COVID-19. The USGA Green Section staff are not health experts and this article is not meant to supersede directives from health professionals.

1. Actively encouraging sick employees to stay home.

Ensuring that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies is a common theme. Many golf courses are allowing staff to take PTO or unpaid time away without restriction. Any employees that are showing symptoms, or those that have been in recent contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, are not being allowed to work and asked to contact their doctor immediately. Similarly, some golf courses are maintaining flexible policies that permit employees to care for a sick family member.

2. Increasing the frequency that surfaces are cleaned and promoting good hygiene.

Many courses are providing disposable disinfectant wipes so that commonly used surfaces such as doorknobs, keyboards, timeclocks and tools can be wiped down by employees before each use. Plenty of hand soap or hand sanitizer is being made available. Employees are being encouraged to wash their hands frequently – for at least 20 seconds each time – and avoid touching their faces.

3. Practicing social distancing.

apart from each other. Employees are avoiding riding side by side in the same vehicle or eating lunch in large groups. Tasks like mowing, rolling, plant protectant treatments and sand topdressing can be carried out while maintaining recommended distances between individuals.

4. Adopting creative scheduling to reduce daily staffing levels and limit interactions.

Split shifts where the crew is divided into two independent groups and assigned to work every other day are being implemented at many courses. That way, employee interaction is reduced while still providing them with a certain level of hours and important maintenance tasks can still be achieved.

6. Removal of unessential golf course accessories to limit potential touchpoints.

Many golf courses are eliminating ball washers, bunker rakes, water stations and even flagsticks. A number of golf courses have also made adjustments to the hole itself in an effort to limit touching when picking up a ball. Strategies to prevent balls from dropping down into the hole include turning the hole-liner upside down, raising the liner above the putting surface or placing something into the hole so that a ball cannot roll into it.

7. Updating golf cart and caddie policies for players.

without restriction at most courses, but they are being thoroughly cleaned between each use in the same way that golf carts are.

8. Being prepared for sizeable staff reductions and suspension of all play if required.

There are examples throughout the U.S. where golf courses have temporarily closed to all play. While this may be only necessary in specific locations and under certain situations, golf course superintendents should be prepared for how maintenance practices will need to be adjusted if their course must do the same.

Golf courses throughout the country have been, and will continue to be, impacted by the coronavirus known as COVID-19. Continuously monitor new developments so that you can clearly communicate with employees and golfers. It is important to communicate directly with all staff members regarding their specific roles and responsibilities in prevention planning. The last few weeks have certainly been unprecedented and policy changes could likely be required each day as the situation evolves. As you navigate these uncertain times, please know that the USGA Green Section staff is here to help, as we have been for the past 100 years.

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