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## Early identification to mitigate Fusarium threat this winter

Greenkeepers are using local weather monitoring tools and analysing data more than ever before, to help predict when their turf will be more susceptible to disease.

But not all turf professionals have access to this material and, according to Dr Colin Mumford from the Bayer Turf Solutions team, as a rough guide, the time to begin looking for symptoms of seasonal disease is when you start to think about using the tumble drier, rather than hanging the washing outside.

“Microdochium patch (commonly referred to as Fusarium) is a key disease to watch out for at this time of year, when it begins to get colder and the turf isn’t exposed to the drying effects of the air, and this is when it’s more likely to start appearing,” says Colin.

It’s important that greenkeepers use all the tools available to them, including the long-range weather forecast, in order to ensure playing surfaces are in tip-top condition going into the winter months.

“Early treatment is the key for disease control,” he says. “The sooner you treat, the less likely it is that the playing surface will be affected.”

He suggests turf managers do not delay spraying when early disease indications become apparent. “Delaying fungicide applications can be a risky policy as, if there’s a sudden change in the weather and you can’t get out with the sprayer, you can easily get caught out, and end up watching helplessly as the disease takes hold and spreads across your playing surfaces.”

Colin advises that turf should be examined every day for any sign of Microdochium patch. “If the long-term forecast says the weather will be alright, then it’s credible to hold back. If not, don’t take a chance.”

Turf managers should be looking for early signs of disease, with preventative, rather than curative treatments vital to ensure the best playing surfaces throughout the year.

Colin urges everyone to be prepared for increased threats during winter in most areas, and also notes the importance of a planned approach to treatment.

“Where conditions are conducive to disease, leaving turf that shows symptoms of a disease or turf stress for as little as five days to ‘see how it goes’, can result in a rampant outbreak.



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“Spraying turf prior to disease symptoms being evident, in other words, preventative treatment, should be based on the environmental conditions, historical disease threat and knowledge of the turf. Curative sprays should take place as soon as any symptoms are seen,” says Colin.

He notes that where there are budget constraints, preventative treatments are often avoided to save spending money where there is not yet a need. However, Colin says treatment programmes must be based on a combination of weather information, visual assessments and knowledge of the playing surfaces’ reaction to certain environmental conditions.

“If it’s left until the disease takes hold of the turf, an eradicated treatment will be necessary. This is more likely to lead to scarring which will take longer to grow out.”

Colin says that the industry is now reviewing and assessing weather data more effectively, enabling individuals to make a more informed decision. “With all the technical advances today, there is a greater awareness of risk factors. This, combined with knowledge of the playing surfaces and coupled with a planned approach, puts managers in a strong position for effective and efficient integrated disease control this season.”

When monitoring for Microdochium patch, the first telltale signs are small brown and yellow patches on the grass blades, and the turf looks greasy or watery, and feels slimy to the touch. These small patches grow rapidly, joining up, and large areas of grass die back.

“Sward composition is important here, if you have predominantly annual meadow-grass, the chances are you will be seeing more die back. With a fescue or bent mix, there may not be quite the same issue.

“What’s important to remember is that members want 100 per cent grass cover that looks nice and plays well. More importantly, any disease can cause a dip in the canopy due to the turf dying back, which on a green can mean a poorer putting surface and can affect the roll of the ball. The majority of golf courses, for example, are heavily dependent on green fees, so attracting and keeping players, who appreciate the good surface, is vital.”

“My advice is to keep an eye on the long-range weather forecast and act accordingly,” says Colin. “Turf managers can’t afford not to pay close attention to the weather, as it dictates so many things and is an essential tool in any maintenance routine.”



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He urges managers to keep surfaces as dry as possible this winter, understanding that disease thrives in damp and wet conditions. "It's advisable to remove the dew from the grass leaves, daily or even several times a day if the weather is misty or foggy.

"The sooner a threat is spotted, and action taken, the less likelihood of scarring on the surface. This is why it's important to monitor the turf daily for early disease onset," says Colin.

The combination of the two active ingredients iprodione and trifloxystrobin can be used in almost every eventuality. They cover two different fungicide chemical classes and therefore offer control at any stage of the disease's development.

#### **Greenkeepers checklist:**

- Look at turf daily and be ready to take immediate action as soon as any disease threat is spotted;
- Use the long range weather forecast as a key management tool;
- Use prevention rather than cure when you plan your integrated disease management programme;
- Keep turf on playing surfaces as dry as possible – especially during misty and foggy periods

