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Switching greens key to managing winter disease

Along with a sound understanding of the historical disease threat to your greens, keeping playing surfaces dry during the winter months will help prevent infections and maintain turf condition.

Daily switching removes dew, keeping playing surfaces dry and as a result avoiding a disease conducive environment. In an ideal world, I would advise that switching be carried out whenever there are damp conditions or where moisture readily forms, however this isn't always possible. During winter, switching is more important than ever, particularly in advance of snow, as it helps ensure turf is in as healthy a state as possible when hit by bad weather.

Switching also removes surface debris such as leaf litter and worm casts. Worm casts not only affect the playing performance characteristics of a green, such as ball roll, but also brings weed seeds to the surface and provide an ideal germination site for the seed. If left on the playing surface the worm casts can be flattened and smeared across the surface underfoot or by machinery, which can cap the surface and reduce surface water infiltration rates. The flattened casts will also affect ball roll on golf greens, so it's important that worm casts are dispersed by switching as soon as possible.

Another key consideration at this time of year is the disease threat brought on by adverse weather conditions. No two greens are the same, therefore there's no 'one size fits all' approach that can be advised during the winter season. However, it's important that greenkeepers and turf managers know what disease threatens their greens, and what pressures they are likely to encounter in certain weather conditions.

With all of the meteorological advances, greenkeepers can easily assess the impact of incoming weather and have a greater awareness of and pre-empt the risk.

For example, if a significant snow cover is forecast, then a preventative spray of a fungicide treatment, such as Interface®, will help the plant to fight off potential disease outbreaks while the turf is under the cover of snow. Turf stressed by snow, particularly if not already in a healthy state, is more susceptible to fusarium and pink snow mould. A preventative, rather than reactive, approach will place you in a better position come spring.



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Yet, if a light snowfall is predicted, for example a sprinkling lasting no longer than 24 hours, then a fungicide may not be required but it depends on the health of the turf at that time. However, a greenkeeper's knowledge of how their turf reacts to specific weather conditions will help determine the best course of action.

