

WASH RACK BLUES

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DRIP, DRIP, DRIP. You have heard it thousands of times, at thousands of locations. With the possible exception of the air we breathe, no other compound in the world is more necessary or valuable than water. Its components provide the very lifeblood to virtually all living creatures. To golf courses, it is the single most important part of a successful operation. It also represents the greatest hazard!

The greatest what? How can such an important aspect of a golf course be a hazard? It can if you are not paying attention to a potential time bomb of environmental concern — the wash rack area.

The Problem

During the past several years, the USGA has committed considerable funding to answer questions concerning golf courses and the environment. Do the pesticides we use pose a real threat? Are nitrates from golf courses entering potable water sources and causing problems? While answers will be derived from this fundamental research, the *one* area that has received far less attention is the maintenance facility. More specifically, the area where mowers are cleaned and sprayers are washed represents one of the greatest potentials for nutrient and chemical escape into nearby streams or water sources.

For a moment, consider the conditions of the wash area. Rarely is there turf to capture fertilizer washed from spreaders. There is no thatch to immobilize residues from sprayers. Often there is nothing to catch the clippings washed from mowers. In short, if you currently have a wash area that allows water to flow freely into a waterway or simply “disappear” into the soil, you are facing a potential problem. With this situation in mind, consider the following types of wash areas.



At the very least, try to capture all of your clippings.

Lost and Forgotten

Unfortunately, this type of wash area is among the most common. They usually are characterized by the lack of a permanent surface, with water and residues entering a stream, forest, lake, or the soil. These wash areas must not be forgotten. They must be eliminated and lost! For those who possess this type of wash area, steps should be taken to improve the situation. These could include:

- Establishing multiple on-course wash sites. Nearly every golf course has several

areas that can withstand the washing of mowers and spreaders for approximately one week. These sites can be assigned on a rotational basis to minimize accumulation of clippings.

- Minimizing sprayer cleaning. The old practice of dumping the remains of a spray tank should long ago have gone the way of the dinosaur. Many golf courses now rinse their spray tanks with water and apply the diluted material back onto the best filter available — turfgrass. To expedite this operation, the use of a single, high-volume

nozzle can empty a 150-gallon sprayer in a matter of minutes. The tank then can be rinsed with a neutralizing agent at the wash area. Obviously, this does not apply to certain herbicides that can cause damage to the turf.

The Honey Pot

Ah, the sweet aroma of accumulated clippings that are cleaned from the wash area after one or two weeks of 90°F temperatures. The smell can best be described as *ripe!* This type of wash area usually has a permanent base of asphalt or concrete that directs all water, clippings, and residues to a catch basin. In some cases, they drain into a leach field, but often the end result is water movement into waterways or into the soil. Fortunately, various types of screens and baskets are used to capture clippings for disposal or composting.

This wash area is preferred to the previous type; however, it also is usually associated with chemical residues flowing with the water. Minimizing potential prob-

lems with this type of wash area includes establishing on-course cleaning sites and a spray tank cleaning program with rinsates sprayed on turfgrass areas.

The Newer Sewer

The previously mentioned wash racks comprise the great majority of those found on most golf courses. Both are inherently flawed due to their limited ability to capture various chemicals or nutrients derived from mowers, spreaders, sprayers, and petroleum products. Both can be significantly improved if there is access to a sewer or if a more refined method of filtration is added.

Some golf courses are linking into sewer outlets with simple, yet effective, filtering systems. This type of wash area is comprised of four important components.

1. A large concrete apron to collect all water, clippings, and residues from chemicals and petroleum products.

2. A catch basin or series of basins to capture all clippings. These are cleaned on a weekly basis.

3. An oil/water separator. The removal of petroleum products is another area that should be addressed. These can be easily installed and the filters replaced on a regular basis.

4. Access to a sewer. Even if a sewer is not available, careful cleaning of spray equipment, capturing clippings, and filtering petroleum products will minimize potential problems.

The Future

There is a very high probability your golf course has one of the previously mentioned types of wash racks or a variation. In one form or another, all have the potential to directly impact water resources. So what can be done to address this situation? Easy — don't let any of the water escape from the wash area.

As with other facets of the golf industry, manufacturers have heard the call of environmental awareness. Prefabricated units are becoming available that can capture all of the water for reuse. The advantages of these systems include:

- No movement of water from the site.
- Complete capture of all petroleum products by an oil/water separator.
- Complete capture of other fertilizer residues and chemicals.
- Reduction of water use.
- Improved cleaning by the use of a pressure washer.
- Improved efficiency for the mechanic, chemical applicators, and mower operators.
- A reduction of unpleasant odors.
- Total spill containment by combining a pesticide storage building and petroleum waste building. This represents the ultimate in minimizing or completely eliminating the escape of chemical residues from the maintenance facility.

What does the future hold for wash areas? Don't be surprised if this becomes the next area of regulation. To avoid a situation of being forced to comply, consider the following steps now:

1. Educate those responsible for funding.
2. At the very least, install a wash pad with a catch basin or series of basins to collect clippings.
3. Use areas on the golf course to maximize turfgrasses as an effective filter.
4. If possible, install various filters to minimize the outflow of petroleum products and pesticides.
5. Seriously consider a self-contained system to greatly reduce the potential for a problem.

It is true that water can be hazardous, but you can control what happens at one of the worst outflow areas on the golf course. Don't you be caught singing the "Wash Rack Blues."

Lost and forgotten — you may be asking for trouble.

