

UNDER PRESSURE

Dry weather conditions continue to keep turf managers focused on moisture management

by Alastair Higgs, Golf District Manager – UK, Rain Bird Europe



Irrigation on 6th fairway - credit Royal Aberdeen Golf Club

As tabloid press headlines predict a ‘flaming June’, consumers, industry and environmentalists acknowledge the incredibly dry winter and spring experienced in many areas. The Met Office revealed last week that average rainfall during May was around 45% of what’s usually expected. This adds pressure for turf managers and their teams still dealing with the after-effects of last year’s record-breaking heatwave.

When you can no longer rely on the weather to provide the water your turf needs, irrigation system efficiency and moisture control are crucial. While you can’t control weather, there are steps you can take to conserve water, to maximise the impact of any you apply, and control consumption. This, in turn, puts you in a position to react and adapt when conditions change.

Here’s some advice for making the most of every drop.

- From an agronomic and a financial perspective, it’s important to monitor water consumption. You might know how many minutes your system is running for, but what volume is being applied? This can be monitored, real-time alongside electricity being used.

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- Monitor evapotranspiration rates and apply only the amount of water needed for plant health.
- Even small environmental or mechanical changes can mean irrigation is ineffective. Are dry areas getting the volume of water you think they are? Is there high distribution uniformity (DU)? Is all the water applied actually being used, or is some being wasted because soak time hasn't been factored in?



- Ensure all irrigation zones or areas are consistent; don't mix and match nozzle or rotor types in a zone when you're replacing them if you can avoid it and, set rotors to deliver the correct volume of water in a uniform way. Incorrectly set rotors can result in loss of performance of up to 60%.
- Are certain areas of your course or site regularly hand-watered? A before-and-after audit on these will ensure the correct set up. Turf managers taking time to assess and adjust irrigation practices report a 40% reduction in hand-watering as a result and a reduction on overall run times from superior DU.

- Monitor soil moisture levels regularly with accurate soil moisture sensors so you can irrigate to target volumetric water content (VWC) in each zone.



- Reduce leaks with detection technologies. Monitor theoretical flow on the course against actual pump flow and keep adjusting for optimal efficiency. Ensure infield equipment works properly. Shorten irrigation windows to maximise maintenance and golfing time.
- Monitor water storage in real-time to make fully informed irrigation decisions and not run dry.



- Set aside time to manage irrigation and keep your system running as it should be. Conduct regular maintenance audits in the pump house and on rotors. Keep an irrigation diary, logging faults or alterations that need to be tackled at a later date. Gather data that demonstrates the importance of regular maintenance and consistent monitoring.



Weather patterns and expert long-term predictions suggest that our industry must proactively plan for the future and take action. If your system is ageing, contact us, our distributors or your contractor, about upgrading or replacing it. Upgrading can be inexpensive and carried out in discreet stages, each providing agronomic and efficiency benefits. Replacing a system can seem a daunting prospect, but we can help you get the planning underway and expertly guide you and your employer through the process.



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