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Press Release

Damage to performance turf reported throughout the Northeast.

As the slow start to spring wears on, more damage is evident on golf courses

Norton, MA, April 30, 2014: Following what was a bitterly cold and snow-filled winter season in New England, reports of widespread and devastating damage to performance turf – especially to *Poa annua* – has been reported from Western New York to the coast and Maritime Provinces.

With a membership of more than 190 superintendents across the region, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England (GCSANE) has been working closely with the USGA and its affiliate organizations to provide support and resources to its members during this challenging time. Communication about the cause and recovery period has been critical.

“Under the circumstances it might seem natural to compare neighboring courses when it comes to the conditions we are seeing this spring, but there are many factors that explain why one course may have fared better than another”, said **Mark Gagne**, golf course superintendent at Walpole Country Club and president of the GCSANE. “Some of these factors include the varieties of turf (bentgrass is far superior to annual bluegrass), excessive shade from nearby trees and low lying or poorly drained areas. These conditions can vary greatly from course to course and even from one area to another on the same course. We also know from past years that the distance of just a few miles can make a significant difference in the type and intensity of winter weather events that lead to the type of injury seen this year.”

Poa annua, known in America more commonly as annual bluegrass or simply poa, is found throughout golf courses but oftentimes on putting greens. This is having a serious and wide-ranging impact on the conditions of golf courses, according to **Jim Skorulski** who is a senior agronomist with the United States Golf Association (USGA).

Skorulski, who works with golf courses in the Northeast region, noted that while the damage is widespread, it is hard to determine if the cause was from the flash freezes in December and January or the prolonged solid ice cover, which resulted in a lack of oxygen for turf and a condition called anoxia. It is likely both mechanisms were at work on many golf courses.

During the month of January, a total of 13 days were recorded where temperatures reached above freezing and 14 days where the low temperature was below 10 degrees.

“These drastic swings in temperature coupled with just over two inches of rain for the month of January could possibly be a direct result of low temperature kill that many courses are now experiencing,” said **Kevin Doyle**, GCSAA Northeast Field Staff.

According to **Michelle DaCosta**, Ph.D. Associate Professor at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, perennial ryegrass death is also being heavily reported, and ryegrass loss has not been seen in the Northeast in quite some time.

While the agronomists are helping to understand the range and cause of damage, local superintendents and golf organizations are doing their best to communicate with golfers and manage expectations for the upcoming spring and summer seasons.

Peter Hasak, director of grounds at Tedesco Country Club in Marblehead, began communicating with his membership in mid March after surveying a few of his playing surfaces. He noted the smell of "anoxia" or the suffocation of turf under ice and saturated conditions.

It was just two years ago when Hasak had his Marblehead layout in pristine conditions as it hosted the 2012 Massachusetts Amateur Championship over a period of five days in July.

While Tedesco Country Club is not on the MGA's Championship Proper rotation this season, there are many other courses that have been forced to re-evaluate their competitive schedules.

Jesse Menachem, executive director of the Massachusetts Golf Association (MGA), reported that a number of the early-season events and qualifiers have been canceled or rescheduled.

“Many of the New England State Associations have had to do the same,” said Menachem. “The MGA understands the constraints and limitations that these clubs face and how important time will be in order for the course to grow-in and prepare for the full golf season that awaits us.

To learn more about the devastating injury to turf and the winter damage reported, please visit the following sites:

- **WMUR Report (NH):** [Local golf courses deal with severe winter damage](#)
- **USGA Northeast Regional Update:** [You're Not Alone... By Jim Skorulski](#)
- **USGA Webcast:** [Assessing Winter Injury and Promoting Turf Recovery](#)
- **Portland Press Journal (ME):** [Maine greens go brown from severe ice damage](#)
- **Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England:** www.gcsane.org
- **Golf Course Superintendents of America:** www.gcsaa.org