

One Beep Ahead of the Storm

Early warning for investment protection.

by JOHN H. FOY



Providing each of the golf course and landscape maintenance staff at Laurel Oak Country Club with a pager has proven to be a simple, yet effective means of keeping everyone aware of dangerous weather developments.

QUESTION: *What is the largest investment for all golf course maintenance operations?* When this question was asked of several superintendents, the two most common responses were the equipment inventory and the irrigation system. *Well, what about the staff?* When this point is raised, there was instant agreement that the course maintenance staff was indeed an important investment for all facilities. An innovative means of protecting this investment is using beepers to stay in touch with your staff.

In Florida, violent thunderstorms build up quickly and occur almost daily during the summertime. In advance

of and during these storms, a large number of lightning strikes often occur. The Tampa Bay area along the central West Coast of the peninsula is the *Lightning Capital of the World*. Thus, for everyone who works outside, staying aware of developing storms and moving into a safe location when necessary are important and just make common sense.

Laurel Oak Country Club in Sarasota, Florida, is a 36-hole private residential community just south of the Tampa Bay area. As with other courses throughout the state, the pro shop staff is responsible for warning golfers of approaching storms and closing the

courses to play. A Toro Electrical Storm Indication Device (ESID) is located in the pro shop and sirens are used throughout the courses to sound warnings for golfers. The pro shop staff also immediately calls the office of Everett E. (Mack) Baugh, Golf and Landscape Operations Manager, to keep the maintenance staff up to date on the lightning situation. In addition, a DTN Weather Center is in place at the course maintenance facility and is used to help track approaching storms and to assist in planning turf management practices.

Although the storm/lightning warning system has worked satisfactorily, there were some locations around the 830-acre property where the sirens could not be easily heard. This was especially true for staff who operate equipment while wearing hearing protection devices. Also, with an average staff size of 30, Mr. Baugh felt that a lot of time was wasted when everyone returned to the maintenance facility for thunderstorms of short duration. While discussing these concerns one day with a club member in the telecommunications business, the idea of providing the staff with beepers was suggested.

After some investigation of leasing options, it was decided to give this idea a try. Now, every morning, staff members clip on a beeper before heading out of the maintenance facility. When it is desired to advise the crew about a weather concern, it is a simple matter of dialing one phone number and entering one of three codes:

5555: Go to shelter

6969: Go to work

911: Come to maintenance

Providing each staff member with a beeper has proven to be an effective and efficient early warning setup. The annual cost of this program is approximately \$3,500. While this may seem expensive to some, at Laurel Oak Country Club it is viewed as a worthwhile expenditure for protecting their biggest investment — their staff.

JOHN H. FOY is Director of the Green Section's Florida Region and is based in Hobe Sound, Florida.