

The Question I Dread

when I tell people, I work with golf clubs on safety, the response often leaves me scratching my head, generally, along the lines of "Safety in golf clubs, you mean making sure people don't get hit with a club or ball". Lets see!



A tranquil place

The safety community know the two most dangerous industries in the country are agriculture and building, the statistics speak for themselves, those that work within golf know the industry to be part agriculture, part construction, with leisure, retail, hospitality and event management thrown into one place, add vehicle and machinery maintenance, then land and facility management and you have a golf club. How is this so?

Agriculture comes from the agronomic practices that are required to maintain a golf course, a golf course will be on anything from 50 (9 holes) to approx. 200 hundred acres of land, some much bigger. That site will have a management programme that involves fertility, irrigation, drainage, landscaping, turf maintenance, golf course preparation, habitat management and woodland management.



Turf maintenance



COSHH, COSHH and more COSHH then a bit of DSEAR

An 18 hole golf course will have approx. 130HA of fine turf, 150HA of coarse turf, then perhaps; 80 sand bunkers; lakes, ditches; reservoirs; ponds; bridges; paths; woodland; specimen trees; gardens cart paths, stairs, boundary fences and much more besides. These require two things to maintain them, manual labour and machinery.



Manual handling

in most instances, lots and lots of machinery! It is not uncommon for a golf club to have over £1m invested in machinery with even the humblest of golf clubs having invested substantial amounts.



Tricky stuff

That machinery will include 360 Excavators; Wood Chippers; Tele Handlers; Front Loaders; Augers; Tipping Trailers; ATV's; Tractors; Crop Sprayers; PTO driven attachments such as Trenchers, Top Dressers, Leaf Collectors and Blowers. There

will be a ride on mowers lots and lots of different types of mowers and an irrigations system that has many miles of underground piping and hundreds of pressurised control valves.



Grass cutting on a constant basis

Handheld equipment including; Chainsaws that are used frequently, as are of Strimmer's; Backpack Blowers, Hedge Trimmers, Pole Pruners, Pedestrian Mowers, Whack Plates, Rotavators, Pedestrian Aeration Equipment and much more, a long list of equipment that exposes users to noise, vibration, hazardous substances and manual handling.



Handheld Equipment (Noise, Vibration and Manual Handling)

Equipment needs maintaining, so there is a maintenance hub that stores the fleet, with a vehicle workshop performing routine services and emergency breakdowns, a lot of emergency breakdowns, working underneath vehicles on a daily basis, grinding and welding on a regular one.



Machinery requires maintenance

The equipment is all used on land that is undulating, often severely so and in use 365 days a year meaning ground conditions constantly change. The golf course is a sports facility with players hitting a small projectile around the place that travels at speeds of up to 150mph, not always with the greatest control or etiquette putting other players, and those that are working on the golf course at risk. Organising the work programme to avoid contact with golfers is something all course managers put a lot of time into, the main way of doing this starting at first light so you can work ahead of them, recent years have seen a move towards starting work in the dark having machinery fitted out with lighting systems.



Lone working, isolated and in the dark



Terrain takes its toll



Equipment too



The unexpected

Additionally, there may be public footpaths, bridle paths or even public highways to navigate between parts of the golf course. There will certainly be golf buggies traveling around, again, not always with the greatest control or etiquette, maybe disabled buggies with a set of clubs strapped aboard, being driven on terrain they certainly weren't designed for.



For hire

Managing the land comes with a high legislative burden, there are the well-known regulations; PUWER; COSHH; LOLER; CNWR; CVWR; MHOR; DSEAR; WAHR, RRFSo regulations. And the not so well known; FEPA (Food and Environmental Protection Act 85); COPR (Control of Pesticides Regulations Act 86); PPR (Plant Protection

Regulations 95); GWR (Ground Water Regulations 09) as well as the local things like TPO's (Tree Protection Orders) endangered species, land designated AONB or even SSSI! Yes SSSI many golf courses are designated SSSI, for whilst It is true in many parts of the world golf does not fit naturally into the landscape, this is not the case in northern Europe where the perfect turf can be found in the most natural of areas such as seaside links, moor or heath and on the chalk downs. In the UK golf clubs are regarded as wildlife havens providing habitat that would otherwise be destroyed, golf clubs are frequently having to deal with the Environment Agency, Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities and National Heritage Authorities.



Ecological management

Golf is a competitive industry, the customers demanding. There is a continuous drive for improvement of the golf course, and the need to protect or recover the golf course from erosion, wear and tear or damage. Golf construction projects can be as humble as rebuilding a tee, or as complex as rebuilding all 18 greens or installing a reservoir.



Tee construction



Irrigation systems



Building a golf green



Building a pond

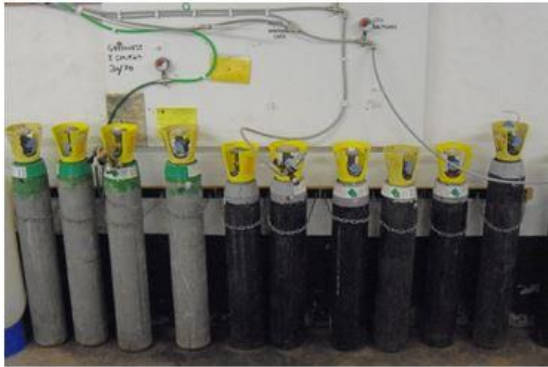
There is a whole industry out there of sports grounds contractors and golf course architects, the industry probably as busy as it has ever been. Innovation and improvement are driven by the goal of free draining playing surfaces that can resist adverse weather events of drought, storm and cold, maximizing the potential of the golf course.



Competition drives improvement

The clubhouse, a hub of politics and opinions. In a private member club perhaps 500 people all with differing opinions as to the best direction for the business. It will certainly have a bar, perhaps 3 bars, reception, outdoors eating area, indoors

eating areas, an entire catering department doing functions with a restaurant, a half way hut selling warm snacks, a retail outlet for the golf pro and his staff, administration dept. locker rooms, showers, meeting rooms, storage areas, there could be a business breakfast meeting or a wedding taking place.



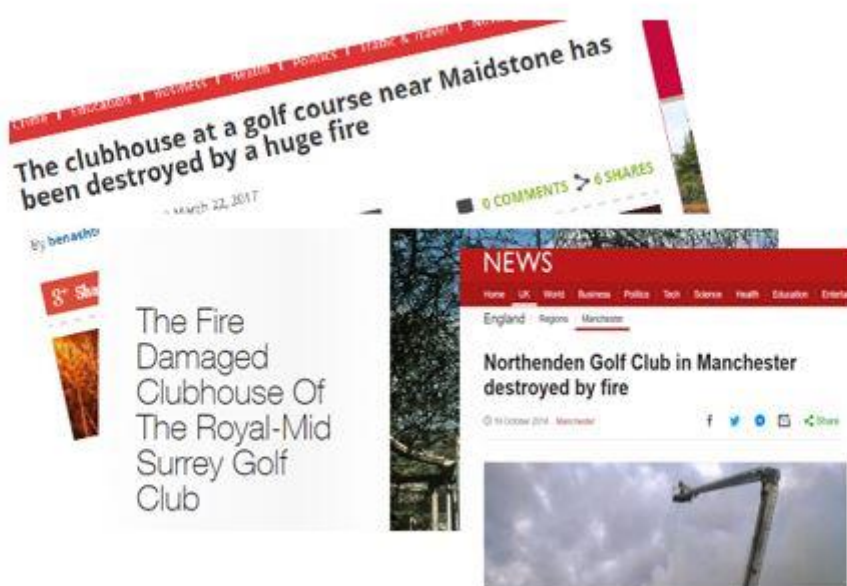
Behind the scenes

The business may be run by the member's committee, changing hands on an annual basis making continuity and accountability a thing of the imagination, or it could be a board of directors or trustees few of whom will be prepared to take accountability for liability and compliance, they will spend countless hours discussing the length and colour of socks allowed on the golf course, the safety of staff or the public rarely. This is not always the case when it comes to golf clubs corporately owned, they will have the support of an HR dept. and a safety manager that the private golf club does not enjoy. But even then it is frequently the case that what happens on the golf course is a bit of a mystery, something that happens by magic.



Meanwhile the golf continues regardless

In the clubhouse the burden of Fire is always high as is Slips and Trips; Electricity; Legionella; Asbestos and managing deliveries.



Too frequent

So when someone says to me "Safety in Golf Clubs, you mean making sure people don't get hit with a club or ball" my response is always "Yes that's right" Its far simpler that way.