



# From Piecemeal to Profound

## Making Golf's Environmental Game Strategic

By Kevin A. Fletcher

**"OVER TIME, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS WILL HAVE A MUCH MORE PROFOUND IMPACT ON THE GOLF INDUSTRY THAN ANY PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE..."**

**- ROBERT N. CARROW, PH.D., USGA GREEN SECTION RECORD, AUGUST, 2007**

Over the past 20 years progress has been made in the golf industry to better protect the natural environment. Over this time golf course owners, operators, club boards and managers alike have grown to understand and embrace their responsibilities of managing and protecting wildlife, water, and other natural resources.

Yet, golf facilities across the country with the sincere intent to act responsibly towards the environment are continuing to rely upon piecemeal and project-based environmental management approaches that fall short of what regulators and the community at-large are coming to expect from 21st century business operators.

### GOLF'S ENVIRONMENTAL GAME

Owners, green committees and club boards believe they are doing their best towards the environment, but the evidence seems to indicate otherwise (see "Half Full or Half Empty: The State of Golf's Environmental Game," *USGA Green Section Record*, November-December, 2009).

For instance, an ongoing survey (see sidebar page 100) launched by e-par USA in early 2013 has revealed thus far that the vast majority of golf clubs and courses:

- Do not have a basic written environmental policy statement
- Have not conducted comprehensive environmental risk assessments on common practices and activities
- Do not have written environmental action plans in place to coordinate staff activity.
- Do not have quick and easy access to all environmental compliance information (regulations, permits, etc.)
- Have no formal, periodic way to ensure that they are in compliance with environmental regulations
- Have no formal, periodic way to ensure that they are managing risk effectively.

Clearly, there's a growing gap between the intent by golf owners and operators to do well and the actual on-the-ground performance and results. The good news is that closing this gap is aided by adopting an *Environmental Management Systems* (EMS), or 'plan-do-check-act' approach, to managing environmental issues.

### PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT

An EMS plan is simply a framework for managing environmental obligations and expectations, which relies upon a "plan-do-check-act" approach. The basic elements of an EMS include the following:

- A review of the businesses' environmental goals
- An awareness of environmental impacts, legal requirements, and any other voluntary standards
- Setting environmental objectives and targets
- Establishing programs and best management practices to meet these objectives and targets
- Monitoring and measuring progress
- Ensuring employees' environmental awareness and competence through training
- Reviewing progress of the EMS and making improvements periodically.

For nearly a decade, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state agencies across the country have been advocating that businesses of all types adopt Environmental Management Systems. In short, it can bring value to any golf club or course, even those already working to address environmental management in piecemeal or project-based ways, either on their own or in conjunction with existing voluntary environmental programs (i.e., Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program). An EMS helps to take your management of the natural environment from reactive to strategic.

### ACTING STRATEGICALLY

The projects and programs currently in place at golf facilities to address environmental obligations ("the things you *need* to do") and expectations ("the things you *want* to do") are positive steps.

## STATE OF SUSTAINABLE GOLF: HOW DO YOU STACK UP?

There are a few key elements of managing golf operations that, if not addressed appropriately, can widen the gap between the intentions to manage the natural environment effectively and the ability to actually do so. You or your staff should be able to answer "Yes" to the questions below.

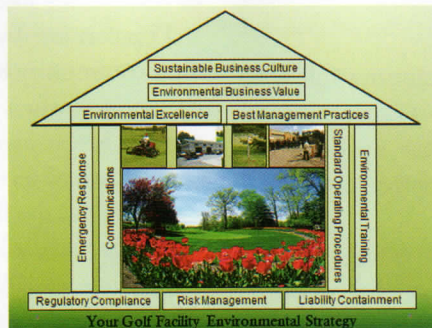
1. Do you have a written Environmental Policy statement approved by senior management or your club Board?
2. Have you conducted a comprehensive environmental risk assessment of all your activities in order to identify areas for improvement?
3. Have you developed written standard operating procedures for activities such as mixing and loading, chemical storage, or water conservation assessments that can be used by staff?
4. Does your golf course staff have written Environmental Action Plans that they use to complete and track intended environmental improvement goals?
5. Do you have written emergency response plans in place and available?
6. Is all of your environmental compliance information (web-links to applicable regulations, stored permit information, etc.) accessible in one central location?
7. Do you have a system in place to periodically check that you're in compliance and managing environmental risk effectively?
8. Is your golf course, clubhouse, and pro shop staff fully equipped with the knowledge and training to protect the environment and act responsibly at all times?
9. Are you confident that you and your staff are finding new ways to both improve environmental performance and save money on an ongoing and continuous basis?



**OVER 10,000 FISH WERE KILLED AS A RESULT OF THE FEBRUARY 2001 PESTICIDE SPILL AT THE WARRINGAH GOLF CLUB, AN ACCIDENT WHICH COST THE CLUB \$600,000 AND LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE E-PAR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR GOLF.**

However, they are pieces to a larger, more complete approach. All the activities devoted to the protection of the natural environment make up an *environmental strategy*. It's like building a house – requiring a firm foundation, a well-constructed frame and a solid roof.

An EMS provides a firm foundation (i.e., achieving regulatory compliance, comprehensive risk management, and



**GOLF'S NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENT SHOULD FOCUS NOT ONLY ON GOLF COURSE OPERATIONS, BUT ALSO INCLUDE THE CLUBHOUSE AND PRO SHOP OPERATIONS.**

addressing environmental liabilities). It establishes a frame for activities (i.e., complete Standard Operating Procedures, emergency response plans, communication protocols, training, EMS compliance checks, roles and responsibilities, environmental action plans).

Finally, it provides roof under which business value can be reaped from required activities, as well as voluntary environmental results (i.e., certifying efforts to protect wildlife, carbon footprinting).

In short, an EMS delivers a number of critical business advantages:

- A more comprehensive approach
- A more systematic approach
- Regulatory compliance, liability & risk management
- Enhanced monitoring, measuring & reporting

- A focus on training & culture-building
- Legitimacy of greening efforts

*A systematic approach drives sustainability.* In 2010, the Environmental Institute for Golf, the Golf 20/20 Environmental Committee and GCSAA's Environmental Programs Committee collaborated to develop a definition of sustainability for the golf industry:

*"The U.S. golf industry recognizes sustainability as the integration of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic viability as a critical and never-ending goal. The golf industry embraces sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

Golf facilities that seek to operate more sustainably and reap the business benefits, will need to plan more comprehensively, act to make improvements, increase monitoring and measuring capabilities, communicate more effectively, and make corrections on an ongoing basis.

The past piecemeal and project-based approaches simply do not meet these growing demands. Sustainable golf demands a more strategic approach and environmental systems are best-suited to serve as the framework for this new strategy approach in golf. **BR**

**SEE CLUB MANAGEMENT - PAGE 100**