

The First Tee

Do You Know Where Your Water Comes from?

by Scott Atkinson, President, NGCOA Canada

Many years ago someone asked me, "Where does Calgary's water come from?" Being rather naïve, my answer was, "From the Bow River."

Come to think of it, delving deeper into the recesses of my memory bank, I remember as a child being asked by my grandmother, "Where do you think that water comes from?" At the time I was busily wasting water on a particularly hot summer day and I believe my response was: "From that tap over there."

I didn't give the matter much more thought until I got into the golf business. All of a sudden I was confronted by things called wells and septic fields. I found myself asking questions like: "Why is it so important that I receive a transfer on the water license to draw water from the canal?"

All I knew is that we were getting far too much water from the sky and flooding seemed to be a larger problem than not having enough water to irrigate with.

However, there's nothing like a dry spell and drought conditions, having undrinkable well water - or worse yet - no drinking water at all on the hottest day of the year, to force you to understand this issue a little better.

As if we operators didn't have enough challenges!

What has always been a concern appears to be growing into a time-consuming and serious issue. Runoffs and their impact on ground water contamination have begun to rear their threatening heads. We are forced to deal with ever-shrinking aquifers and the restrictions that are imposed upon large consumers of water. Dry years and rationing for those who depend on the mountain and watershed runoffs are omnipresent.

In this issue of Golf Business Canada, you will find an article discussing water management and conservation practices, which outlines that as owners, all is not lost. We do have options available to us now. To give just a few small examples, we can install more efficient irrigation systems or modify existing ones. Irrigate less of the golf course. Make sure we spoon-feed our fertilizers and pesticides to reduce our runoffs or groundwater leaching.

We would be wise to be proactive and exercise some of those options at this stage of the game, before the government starts legislating change. We need only look south of the border to see the ramifications: Golf courses facing large water bills and many restrictions.

And so I'll put the question to you: "Do you know where your water comes from?"