

Forecasted temperatures increase potential for desiccation
2/17/16

This winter has been relatively kind to turf managers across Nebraska with near season-long snow cover. However, looking at the ten-day forecast, air temperatures are rising to near record highs with several days reaching into the mid 60's and lower 70's. Couple high winds and low humidity and we should expect the risk of desiccation to increase in the foreseeable future.

Here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we are actively measuring the crown moisture content of a creeping bentgrass fairway to assess the risk of turf death from desiccation. We are evaluating the effectiveness of commonly used desiccation prevention treatments at JSA Turfgrass Research Center in Mead, NE. In this study we have been withholding all forms of precipitation to evaluate the treatments in a worst-case scenario for desiccation. **With crown moisture contents ranging from 60-66% among our treatments, we have no concerns about desiccation at this time;** turf death becomes a concern approaching 50%. However, with the increased temperatures in the forecast, we should expect to see crown moisture declines.

While it's difficult to determine how rapidly a decline in crown moisture is occurring, continue to monitor your turf and the water status in the soil to help guide management decisions. Consider inspecting the turf now and investigate the crowns of several turf plants. A healthy crown will appear white and plump; when you squeeze the crown, you will have water residue on your fingers. As you continue to monitor the turf over the next couple weeks, take note of how the crown is responding to the warm temperatures. If the crowns appear bigger and whiter, it may be a sign of de-acclimation and the turf is starting to break dormancy. If the crowns decrease in size and start to turn brown, this may be a sign of moisture stress. If found, light amounts of irrigation can help rehydrate the crowns. We will be continuing to monitor crown moisture levels over the next couple of weeks and provide updates in a timely fashion.

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