

“Winter” watering turfgrass March 4, 2020

While it’s still technically winter, the warm and dry weather means that many golf course superintendents and field managers will be charging up their irrigation systems soon. These warm, dry and windy conditions will challenge sensitive turfgrass species (creeping bentgrass, annual bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass) with significant desiccation stress. [Our research shows](#) that crown moisture content for these species can rapidly decline to lethal levels under these conditions during late winter (Fig. 1). The risk is most severe when these species are growing on sand-based root zones including golf putting greens and tees and sports fields.

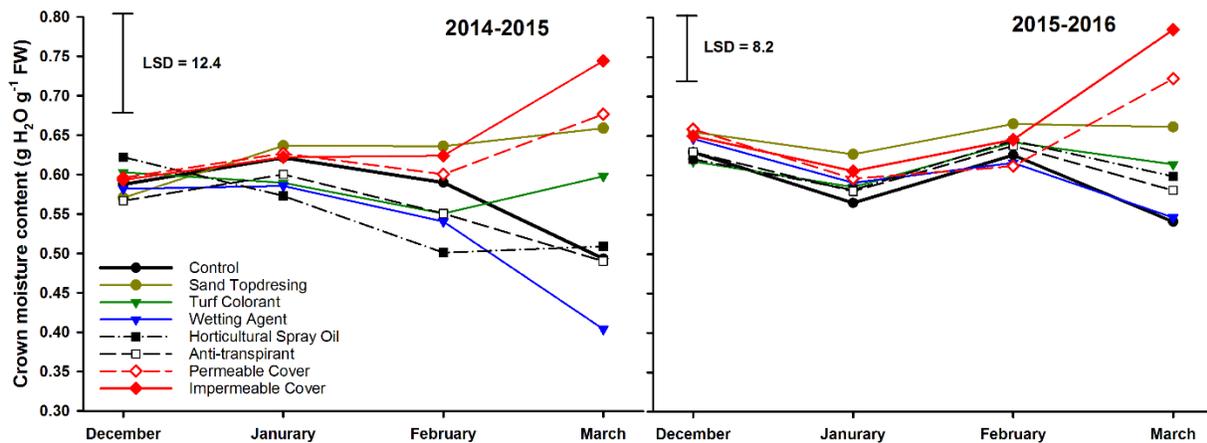


Figure 1. Crown moisture content (CMC) of creeping bentgrass fairways rapidly changed from winter levels from mid-February to mid-March. Light irrigation can help prevent from declining to lethal levels.

The “nice” weather also means these high-risk turf areas are going to be receiving significant traffic stress from golfers, soccer games, and spring baseball practice. Light watering will help sustain crown moisture and minimize the risk of turfgrass injury. I would still avoid heavy irrigation that could promote rapid spring green-up because a cold snap is still possible in the future.

There is no concern for tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and buffalograss lawns at this time. These species are more tolerant to winter desiccation stress. Home irrigation systems should not be pressurized. There is still risk of stress of another freeze that could damage recharged irrigation equipment (especially exposed back-flow preventors).

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