

**Damage report: Winterkill assessment
February 14, 2014**

Winterkill is on the minds of turf managers around the country. It's been a tough winter with long-term snow and ice cover in the Upper Midwest and Northeast, below freezing temperatures and snow in the south, and windy dry conditions in the Great Plains. Instead of simply waiting and hoping for the grass to green-up this spring, many turfgrass managers are proactive and sample problematic winterkill areas during late winter. They feel it is better to be proactive than reactive when dealing with winterkill because it provides time to communicate with your clients and plan for the recovery during the spring.

The easiest way to assess winterkill damage is to bring grass samples inside and force them to green-up. Sample from areas that historically suffer winterkill injury (i.e. exposed area or low areas with frequent ice cover) and from areas that typically survive winter. It's important to sample from area that commonly survive winter to be sure the cores were killed during the sampling. Use a cordless drill with hole saw bit to remove cores from the frozen soil. A 2 inch bit works well. Be careful not to damage the turf canopy and crowns by drilling too deep. If necessary, use a small pry bar or screwdriver to break the core from the soil. Put the cores in a container of sand or potting mix and place them inside next to a sunny window. Be sure to water the cores several times per day and monitor the green-up over the course of a week. The forecast for warm and dry weather next week will provide the perfect opportunity to assess the winterkill damage by collecting turfgrass samples from around your property, and you may be able to use a cup cutter if the soils thaw.

For more information, USGA Senior Agronomist Bob Vavrek has created a short YouTube video on sampling for winterkill injury which is available at <http://goo.gl/Dhxn93>. Look for recommendations on winterkill recovery techniques in future Turf iNfo articles.

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Figure 1. Late winter sampling can help plan for winterkill recovery. Photo courtesy of Zac Reicher