

OnCourse™ Action Plan

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Welcome to your GEO OnCourse™ Action Plan. This automatically generated report is a great starting point for understanding how sustainability relates to your golf business. It will help you identify immediate money saving opportunities, build consensus among key individuals at your club, and plan a range of short and long-term activities to improve your performance, ensuring that members, customers and future customers recognize and value the sustainability of your golfing product.

The next step is to schedule a meeting with the key decision makers at your club to discuss the actions suggested in this plan. Further details and a proposed meeting agenda can be found at the base of this document. Put your club OnCourse™ for GEO Certification now!

Landscape & Ecosystems

By transitioning to stress, drou tolerant and disease resistant turfgrass, you are on course to create resource efficient and high quality playing surfaces. Carrying through this commitment will require the public endorsement of your management team and frequent communications to members and customers.

The landscape and ecosystem quality of your site is directly linked to the quality of your golfing product. Continue exploring opportunities for landscape and ecosystem enhancement. GEO Certification recognises achievements and provides site-visit guidance for prioritising future projects.

Working to improve the ecological value of your site plays an important role in promoting biodiversity. Building a relationship with local conservation groups can support your man-agement efforts with ideas and resources. Maintaining GEO Certification also includes on-site guidance for these projects.

With a detailed inventory of designations guiding and prioritising your management, you will be meeting legal requirements and community expectations. Going forward you could start to consider informally self-designating features of interest as a means to raise awareness among members and customers.

Your comprehensive understanding of landscape and ecosystems enables you to maintain a high quality golfing experience in a living landscape. Why don't you collate some of this information and make it accessible to staff, members and customers? You could seek recognition for your performance through a sustainability assurance such as GEO Certification.

Enhance your golfing experience

From wide open wilderness to biodiverse wetlands, from urban greenspace to golf courses, living landscapes directly influence our quality of life.

By its very nature golf can enhance landscapes and ecosystems - creating and sustaining beautiful and biologically rich open spaces. This unique attribute does more than simply offset the impact of industry-wide resource consumption, it is a significant contribution to the resilience of the natural world.

Water

Minimizing the irrigated area of your site is the most significant activity you can undertake to reduce water waste. The key step is to identify areas that genuinely require irrigation, and then to modify or phase out the use of unnecessary sprinkler heads.

Continual refinement of irrigation practices enables you to maintain fast, firm and fun conditions on your

golf course. Going forward you should continue to evaluate application rates, and regularly service and upgrade your irrigation equipment.

Future-proofing your water sources has established long-term protecting for your business and reputation. Going forward you should keep abreast of new technologies for the efficient harvesting and treatment of water. Close liaison with water authorities will position you to take advantage of future opportunities, for example, drawing grey water and / or treated waste water from neighbouring developments.

With a comprehensive understanding of your water use, you are well-placed to identify potential opportunities for reducing your water use. Advanced activities could include mapping trends and sharing the data as a basis for staff and customer engagement.

Minimising water consumption in your clubhouse and maintenance facility is basic business sense. Measuring and communicating trends in consumption will enable you to quantify savings, further motivating staff and customers to play their part in water saving.

Keep inflow lean and outflow clean

The world population will soon reach seven billion and global water consumption is doubling every 20 years. Water deficits are an immediate and significant issue, with climate change also pressuring infrastructure in many regions.

As with many global industries, golf consumes water directly and indirectly across a broad range of activities – most significantly though the irrigation of over 30,000 golf courses worldwide. Both now and in the future golf must be, and be seen to be, an efficient and responsible user of water.



Energy & Resources

As energy from fossil fuels becomes more expensive, the transition to renewables makes increasing business sense. Benefitting from an abundance of space, golf businesses can save money over time by investing in small scale on-site renewables such as geothermal heat-pumps, biomass boilers and solar hot water. In many countries free advice and government subsidies are readily available.

An ad-hoc approach to energy efficiency results in missed opportunities to save money. Making a concerted effort to equip your clubhouse and maintenance facility with low energy lighting, insulation, cooling, refrigeration and heating technologies will unlock short-term return on investment.

Without a good understanding of your energy and fuel consumption you are probably wasting money. By collating data and asking staff departments to account for the energy and fuel they use, you can begin to identify immediate opportunities to make savings.

Alongside clubhouse operations, course maintenance is a major consumer of fuel and energy. Being creative in trying to find new areas of rougher, lower maintenance grassland will save you money and can enhance the character, texture, atmosphere and strategy of the course.

Accelerating your transition towards a low-carbon vehicle fleet will further reduce your consumption of oil, diesel and petrol. Electric and hybrid technology is also becoming widespread and cost effective, particularly in golf carts and maintenance vehicles. You should also be exploring opportunities for harnessing micro-renewable technology, eg solar-powered golf carts.

Golf shouldn't cost the earth

For most golf courses, day-to-day turfgrass management is the single largest area of resource consumption. From the energy embodied in the production of maintenance machinery, fertilizers and pesticides, to water treatment and the use of non-renewable fuels, any reduction in turfgrass inputs can unlock significant economic and environmental gains.

Thanks to significant landholdings, many golf facilities are also well placed to harness renewable technologies such as geothermal heating and cooling, and solar and wind-power generation. They can also retrofit energy saving technologies and passive design into courses and clubhouses.



Products & Supply Chains

Reuse and recycling enables your business to operate efficiently, divert reusable resources from landfill and support the growth of the green economy. By communicating a simple purchasing policy to contractors and suppliers you can reduce packaging, source products with recycled and recyclable content, and reduce the total quantity of products you consume.

Expanding the scope of your ethical and environmental procurement can unlock business efficiencies and support the growth of a greener economy. Start by focusing on golf course main-tenance, clubhouse provision and merchandising. Bear in mind that excessive processing, packaging and transportation carry the most significant and potentially unnecessary environmental impacts.

The processing and distribution of pesticides requires a considerable amount of oil and water, and maintaining healthy turf is achievable with minimal use of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. Educating golfers, refining your pest and disease thresholds, and utilising the latest organic and biological products will ensure that you are not consuming any more than you need to.

Golf courses can contribute significantly to the economic wealth of local communities. For many golf businesses that same community makes a significant contribution to its economic health. Whether you operate in a mature or a developing golf market, continuing to 'spend locally' drives an economic system that will ultimately benefit your bottom line.

Whilst the manufacture and supply of some fertilizers has a heavy environmental impact (in the form of mineral mining, natural gas, oil and water consumption), others have a lighter footprint. Optimizing your plant nutrition programme is the first step to minimising this significant area of resource consumption. Going forwards you should continue to test and evaluate local and renewable sources of fertiliser such as animal and plant by-products.

Be good with money

Today more than ever, it matters where we get our materials, what they're comprised of, and how they're processed, transported and disposed of.

By integrating social and environmental issues into purchasing decisions, golf can play its part in the wider drive to develop efficient, equitable, localized and lower carbon supply chains. All golf businesses can use their purchasing power to alter the environmental and ethical quality of the products and services they consume. Waste should simply be viewed as a product that needs processing, making sure as much material as possible is shifted away from disposal.



Environmental Quality

Regular visual analysis, combined with simple biological sampling can tell you a great deal about the quality of your inflow and outflow water. By also undertaking chemical analysis, you will further manage risk and become more confident that you are contributing to a clean and healthy environment.

Your rigorous approach to pollution prevention is helping to ensure your maintenance operations have a net beneficial effect on environmental quality. Continue seeking to reduce turfgrass inputs and to apply the latest technologies in biological products and machinery. See if you can expand the size of no spray zones and buffer strips across the course.

When it comes to hazardous products it only takes one mistake or pollution incident to put your business

at risk. Continue to train and educate key staff members in best practice techniques and be aware that legislation in this area can change rapidly.

As the operational centre for fuel, machinery and hazardous products, and a potential hotspot for pollution, your modern and well equipped maintenance facility is something to be proud of. Continue to invest in the latest technology and staff training.

All water discharging from golf courses and facilities must go on to further treatment or be of high enough quality to enter the wider environment. Are there opportunities to further recycle and treat waste water before it leaves your site, for example by routing it through purpose built reed beds, bio-filters and wetlands?

Healthy places to live, work and play

Well managed golf businesses can improve air, soil and water quality. They can improve rather than degrade environmental quality, often over hundreds of years of land management.

Some of golf's key environmental quality contributions include protecting urban greenspace, regenerating brownfield and contaminated land, sequestering carbon and managing runoff and erosion while conserving soil structure and biodiversity.



People & Communities

Bringing the cultural heritage and history of your site to the heart of your golfing product is enhancing the quality of your golfing experience for members and visitors. Look for ways to raise awareness amongst local people and communities about their traditions and heritage, and the valuable role you are playing in protecting and conserving it.

You are demonstrating that in many locations, golf can be part of a multifunctional land use, and that golf businesses and local people can benefit from this positive relationship. Continue to maintain these valuable community relations, in the knowledge that every future golfer is currently a non-golfer.

Constructive local partnerships and good community relations can pay a significant part in the success of your golf business. Capitalise on the good relations you have to deliver shared promotional, marketing and communications initiatives aimed at getting people into sociable, healthy and active recreation, all within a living landscape.

Modern day sustainability issues are wide ranging. Get a comprehensive overview at golfenvironment.org and use this as a guide and framework for the continual education and training of all staff. Many professional institutes are now delivering high quality environmental education. GEO recommends that you support your employees in maintaining membership of a relevant professional body.

Research proves that your members and customers are increasingly equating sustainability with quality. Use GEO Certification as a quality assurance mechanism that communicates to members, visitors and future customers that your product is high quality because of its sustainability.

Be a catalyst for good in your community

Many golf businesses, and particularly golf facilities themselves, multiply wider social and economic benefits out to local people. Realizing golf's affordable and accessible dimension is also an essential part of the sport's sustainability – expanding the cross section of those who directly benefit from it. For this reason, the availability of facilities to young people, women and time stressed families help to legitimize golf's use of land, water and other resources in the eyes of government and the public.

Next Steps

We recommend that you now convene a meeting to discuss this OnCourse™ Action Plan with your colleagues. Ideally the individuals attending will include Superintendent / Head Greenkeeper, Club Manager / Secretary, Owner, Head Professional / Director of Golf, Food and Beverage Manager and Club Captain / Club President.

The agenda for your OnCourse™ Meeting could look something like this:

1. Environment Team membership;
2. Remit, roles and responsibilities;
3. Current strengths and weaknesses;
4. Key initial actions;
5. Long-term opportunities and flagship projects;
6. How, who, when;
7. Areas to seek professional advisory;
8. GEO Certification.

Golf businesses that are taking environmental and ethical action should be proudly communicating their activities to members and customers. Quality and sustainability are now intrinsically linked in the minds of many – particularly affluent consumers and golfers.

GEO Certification is golf's leading sustainability assurance; a simple eco-label that let's the world know your golf business is delivering benefits to people and the planet. Set your club OnCourse™ today!