

Superintendents delay play until the frost has melted to prevent costly damage to the playing surface. As for how that damage occurs, here's the "science" involved:

Frost is basically frozen dew that has crystallized on the grass, making it hard and brittle. A grass blade is actually 90 percent water, therefore it also freezes. Because of the short mowing height (sometimes as low as 1/8 inch) and fragile nature of the turf, putting greens are most affected by frost. Walking on frost-covered greens causes the plant to break and cell walls to rupture, thereby losing its ability to function normally. When the membrane is broken, much like an egg, it cannot be put back together.

Golfers who ignore frost delays will not see immediate damage. The proof generally comes 48-72 hours later as the plant leaves turn brown and die. The result is a thinning of the putting surface and a weakening of the plant. The greens in turn become more susceptible to disease and weeds. While it may not appear to be much of an issue if a foursome begins play early on frost-covered greens, consider the number of footprints that may occur on any given hole by one person is approximately 60. Multiply that by 18 holes with an average day, the result is 216,000 footprints on greens in a.

Now that you have a little better understanding about the basics of frost delays, try not to get so hot under the collar the next time your tee time is pushed back. One sure way to prevent such frustration would be to get in the habit of calling your golf course before heading out to play on those spring and fall mornings when your car's windshield is frost-flecked.