

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

SAFETY MEANS YEAR-ROUND CARE



July is the month when a large number of schools and colleges attempt to bring their football and practice fields back in shape after two months of neglect. Since the end of spring soccer and intramurals, the condition of their fields has been a low priority with infrequent mowing, very little irrigation and hardly any attention to compaction or weed control. It's not surprising that many of these fields become accidents waiting to happen during the summer.

For three years I lived next to a high school in northern Ohio. The varsity football field was right behind my house and I used to jog around

the track every evening. I couldn't help but notice how this field deteriorated between May and July. The mowing stopped the last week of spring quarter and did not resume until three weeks before the football team started practice in August. By late June, the field looked like a pasture ready for baling into hay.

In late July, the hottest and driest time of the year, the school hired a contractor to chop down the half-dormant turf so the school's rotary mowers could take over. After the groundskeeper raked up the piles of clippings, a drum aerator was pulled across the field by a tractor. It bounced along on the tips of its tines penetrating less than an inch. Fertilizer and what looked like annual ryegrass were spread over the worn out center of the field. Finally, a rented surface irrigation unit was brought in to soak the field for two weeks.

To be honest, I was amazed at the recovery of the turf. When the freshmen suited up for tryouts in August, the big green field must have added to the challenge of trying out. By the third game of the season, however, the bare spots were back. It never failed, at least one game was played in the rain, leaving behind hard ridges of dirt in the bare spots. It wasn't long before the team had two or three injured players watching the games from the sidelines.

Sports turf management must be a year-round process, geared to the needs of the turf, not the vacation schedule of the maintenance staff. Turf will not provide the dense, resilient surface it needs for sports when maintenance is abruptly stopped for three months during the summer.

Since I've lived in the West, I've noticed the tremendous difference an irrigation system and year-round maintenance make on the quality of athletic fields. An irrigation system requires a commitment that forces the maintenance staff to pay regular attention to the condition of fields. These schools have the same vacation schedules and budgets as schools in other parts of the U.S. Granted, they have no choice. Turf won't grow here without irrigation. But, from May through September, there aren't many places in this country where turf will grow well without irrigation.

School and college administrators have a growing awareness of their institution's liability for field-related injuries. If they look into the primary causes of poor fields, they quickly discover the answers are consistent, year-round maintenance, some type of irrigation and increased control over field use. These factors apply regardless of the school's location.

Administrators are learning that they don't save money by reducing field maintenance in the summer. They only expose themselves and their schools to the larger, unpredictable cost of field-related injuries later in the season. Wise administrators are increasing their summer maintenance programs and reducing their exposure to senseless injuries, higher insurance premiums, and legal fees. The best way to provide safe fields will always be year-round maintenance.

Bruce Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JULY

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Kansas Turfgrass Field Day, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS. Contact: Larry Leuthold, Horticulture Dept., Waters Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506. (913) 532-6173.

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Missouri Turfgrass Field Day, South Farm, University of Missouri, Columbia. Contact: Dr. David Minner, Dept. of Horticulture, 1-40 Agriculture Bldg., Columbia, MO 65211.

AUGUST

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Recreational Liability Seminar, National Geographic Society Auditorium, Washington, DC. Contact: National Society of Park Resources, 3101 Park Center Dr., Alexandria, VA 22302, (703) 820-4940.

9-12

Park Planning and Maintenance School, Clarion Hotel, Colorado Springs, CO. Contact: Frank Cosgrove, P.O. Box 6900, Colorado Springs, CO, 80934, (303) 632-7031.

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Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Day, Rutgers Soils and Crops Research Center, Halls Mills Rd., Adelphia, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, Soils & Crops Dept., Cook College, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (201) 932-9453.

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University of Rhode Island Turf Field Day, Turf Research Farm, Kingston, RI. Contact: C.R. Skogley, URI, Plant Sciences Dept., Woodward Hall, Kingston, RI 02881, (401) 792-2570.

SEPTEMBER

10-11

Alabama Turf Conference, Auburn Conference Center/Best Western, Auburn, AL. Contact: Alabama Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 70, Auburn, AL 36831. (205) 887-6916.