

CHEMICAL LOG

Herbicides At Work In Turf Renovation

The Waukegan, IL, Park District faces a challenge common to municipalities nationwide—maintaining high-visibility parks and athletic fields. To keep its grounds in the kind of shape its users have come to expect, this well-respected district uses a number of tools. Herbicides, in addition to cultural and mechanical practices, play a vital role.

"Herbicides provide the right tool for the job," says Greg Petry, Waukegan Park District superintendent and president-elect of the Sports Turf Managers Association. "They're a great tool for keeping weeds in check. If you have a maintenance routine set up to make parks safe, you are, in essence, doing the same things that are going to make them beautiful."

Located in the predominantly urban area between Milwaukee and Chicago, the Waukegan Park District staff maintains 360 acres of parkland and 14 athletic fields. According to Petry, broadcast herbicide applications work best on areas that receive high traffic or are particularly unsightly.

Integrating herbicides with mechanical measures produces the best overall maintenance program, says the superintendent. For Waukegan, the cost of herbicide treatment is one dollar per thousand square feet. Asked how the cost compares to those of mechanical measures, Petry says simply, "It doesn't—that would be comparing apples to oranges. We haven't done a cost analysis because it's obvious that herbicides are more effective and economical."

In addition to saving money, time, and manpower, herbicides offer long-term weed control. Mechanical weed control methods, such as using a sod cutter to scalp weeds, are less effective.

"Scalping weed isn't very beneficial because crew members only scalp the top growth," Petry explains. "The roots remain intact and eventually sprout again. An herbicide, like Roundup provides about 95 percent control of weeds."

The park district maintains a symbiotic relationship with the nearby school dis-

trict. The school districts' athletic program, while secondary to education, is an important component of the system. Limited funds have led the two districts to frequently lean on one another.

"Our district has the expertise, equipment, knowledge, and skills to help them renovate and maintain their athletic fields," says Petry. "By the same token, we use their baseball diamonds for park-related activities. It's a good tradeoff—it makes for a strong working relationship."

When renovating football fields for local schools, crew members apply Roundup

In addition to saving money, time, and manpower, herbicides offer long-term weed control.

as a burndown treatment. Applied with a tractor-pulled boom sprayer, the herbicide is *always* used at recommended label rates.

After the burndown, crew members core aerify the field, followed by broadcast, slit-seeding with desirable grass seed and topdressing. "Apply some fertilizer and you have the field back in shape," Petry says.

For spot spraying undesirable vegetation after the renovation, the department applies Trimec™ at recommended rates with a backpack sprayer. This herbicide is used to control broadleaf weeds, clover, and knotweed.

Petry and his crew also use herbicides for weed control around parking lots, side-

walks, fence lines, and bleachers. "The best philosophy regarding herbicides is 'spray only when necessary,'" Petry emphasizes. "It is important to follow safety precautions and spray herbicides at proper rates."

The district uses a combination of in-house and private contractor spraying. Even contracting out the work can be more expensive, companies usually guarantee that weeds will not grow back, says Petry. If necessary, reapplications are at the contractor's expense. Because of the contractor guarantee, the crew need only follow up with minor spot spraying in the fall. Petry employs two crew members who perform 99 percent of the in-house spraying. Both are licensed by the State of Illinois for pesticide application.

"Besides the contractor, Arthur Clesen, Incorporated, our distributor, has given us a lot of support," says Petry. "They've helped teach our employees about how herbicides should be used."

Other cultural practices the district uses include aerifying, fertilizing, topdressing, and overseeding. If kept up on a seasonal basis, turfgrasses are more likely to out-compete, Petry adds, which is one of the district's long-term maintenance goals.

"Incorporating different vegetation management measures into our program is a balancing act," Petry says. "You need to set your priorities and stay with them to make it work. As a result, the Waukegan Park District has brought its grounds to a point where significant weed problems no longer exist."

The determination to do the job right has been recognized, and not just by the thousands of people who use the parks and athletic fields. The district won the STMA's Best Park and Municipal Diamond of the Year in 1988-1989, a distinction that still makes Petry proud.

Roundup® is a registered trademark of Monsanto Agricultural Company. Trimec™ is a registered trademark of PBI-Gordon Corp.