
EXPLORING EQUIPMENT

Getting Your Shop Together

Like the rooms in a home, each room or dedicated space in a maintenance facility has a specific yet-simple purpose. Simplicity translates to improved organization, which in turn means keeping everything in a certain place. For this reason, the basic maintenance shop often includes the following dedicated rooms or spaces:

Superintendent's office. Superintendents and sports turf managers deal with employees and vendors daily. Their offices don't have to be "plush," but they do have to be large and *private* enough for small meetings.

Mechanic's area. Organization is of pivotal importance to a mechanic, which means mechanics need *dedicated* space. These areas should include lockable tool storage, work benches, parts inventory and storage systems, hoists, air compressors, etc.

Equipment storage area. Equipment protected from the elements lasts longer. The equipment storage space should be set-up so equipment used daily is easily accessible. Doors should be tall and wide enough so that equipment can be moved in and out efficiently. They should also be lockable. "Roll-up" doors are a common choice.

Computer room. Large or small, computer rooms *must* be climate-controlled. Computer reliability and durability have improved over the years, but temperature extremes are still the worst enemy of these high-tech machines, whether they're used to control irrigation or for scheduling maintenance crews.

Tool and supply room. Best located near the mechanic's area, this space can be used to store large tools, wheeled tool boxes, and other supplies (excluding pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals). This room should also be lockable.

Fertilizer storage area. Dry fertilizers should palletized and kept off the floor. Depending on local EPA restrictions, these areas may require a concrete gutter to capture spills. The area should be accessible to forklifts if applicable.

Chemical storage area. This may be the most sensitive area on the site. Like those of the fertilizer storage area, legal requirements will vary from locality to locality. Your local EPA office can furnish the necessary specific information and requirements.

The area must be separate from other areas of the facility and *lockable*. Shelves can be used to keep small containers of chemicals in order. Larger containers should be stored on the floor—always concrete and usually incorporating a spill gutter of some sort (Again, consult your local EPA office for specific requirements on chemical mixing and storage.)

The chemical storage area should include a place for mixing. In this area, all safety devices and tools needed for measuring and weighing materials should be well-organized and readily available. A solid, sturdy table for mixing is a must.

On a related note, employees should always wear protective apparel when working with chemicals. A shower and eye wash station should be in the room in the event of accidents or spills. Absorbent pillows and other spill clean-up and containment devices should be within quick, easy reach.

Irrigation parts storage area. Time spent simply "looking for things," particularly items used everyday, is time wasted. Irrigation parts are often small and easily lost or mixed haphazardly with one another. Labeled shelves and bins for commonly needed parts are a great idea. For easy reference, manuals can be stored on shelves above a study workbench. The work area itself should be well lit and should include an electrical outlet. Testing equipment and repair tools should be kept (locked) in this area as well. If the "irrigation man" uses a utility vehicle, it would be ideal if the area was accessible to the vehicle.

Lunch room / employee area. Employees need a place to take a break out of the elements. Like the superintendent's office, this area doesn't have to plush—it just has to be functional and clean.

Tables, chairs, and a bulletin board for posting information are necessary. Refrigerators, hot plates, microwave ovens, and vending machines are nice additions.

Seed storage area. Seed must be stored in a cool dry place, away from chemicals. Bags should be stored off the ground, on shelves or pallets. Enough space for seed priming drums and pregermination bags should be allotted.

Practical Improvements

Should you "inherit" a maintenance facility in need of serious improvement, chances are you won't be able to start from "ground zero." But that doesn't mean you have to live with chaos. There are several inexpensive steps you can take to improve the situation.

One of the most basic problems in maintenance facilities is space — there isn't enough of it to create these specialized areas. Prefabricated metal storage buildings can help solve your space problems.

Organizational problems are less easily solved. They often have more to do with human behavior than maintenance facility design and layout. Assuming that you have a *place for everything* (dedicated spaces, well-marked bins, shelves, cabinets, tool boards, etc.), the challenge is to encourage all employees to put *everything in its place*. Make all employees accountable for returning their equipment to its proper place, as well as cleaning and maintaining it. You may want to create a set schedule for clean-up and organizational activities.

Tough situations rarely get better overnight, and a maintenance facility in disarray is no exception. Try to be patient and pragmatic, and make improvements gradually. Your problems may have less to do with allotted space and more to do with organization, but it probably took time to get that way. It will certainly take time to sort it all out. □