

On the Road Again



My traveling season continued in October, and I was fortunate enough to attend the Turfgrass, Landscape, and Equipment Expo in Costa Mesa, CA. I was more than happy to trade the falling leaves and dropping temperatures of autumn in Chicago for a few days of sunny, pleasant, California weather.

The Southern California Turfgrass Council made the trip worthwhile by hosting a great show. The Orange County Fairgrounds provided great facilities for exhibitors to showcase all of their latest products and innovations. Attendees divided their time between indoor trade show booth browsing and outdoor hands-on equipment shopping.

Workshops provided attendees educational opportunities throughout the show. Lecture titles included "Controlling Tough Weeds," "Selection and Use of Slow-Release Nitrogen Products," "Nozzle Selection for Drift Management," and "Small Engine Maintenance." Each seminar offered the opportunity to earn CEU accreditation hours, as well as GCSAA credits toward certification.

One interesting seminar covered the topic: "Diagnosing Common Diseases." Dr. Don Ferrin from Pacific Plant Health Services discussed ways to recognize signs and symptoms of common turfgrass diseases, so that appropriate steps can be taken to correct problems. Slides provided visuals of the diseases, so attendees could easily recognize them in real-world applications.

Dr. Ferrin said that El Niño has created a great season for diseases — a funny way to describe something that creates so many maintenance headaches. Drenching El Niño rains made turf more susceptible to disease dispersal and put lots of stress on the plants. The constant moisture helped diseases germinate and grow.

Dr. Ferrin used the example to illustrate the principle that disease dispersal depends more on the number of rain events, than on the amount of rain that falls each time. He warns that disease can be promoted by all sources of water: rain, fog/mist, humidity, and irrigation. Keep this in mind when you're planning your irrigation schedule.

Turnout was strong on the Expo's opening morning, but most exhibitors agreed that overall attendance was disappointing. After hearing the same complaint from people at the Florida Turfgrass show, I have to wonder if this represents a significant trend.

Is interest in trade shows waning? Are people choosing to stay home and find their information from other sources, or are tightening budgets preventing them from making trips to these shows?

Perhaps there's something more at work here. The GCSAA show has been posting record attendance figures for the past few years. Maybe the bigger shows are drawing people away from smaller, regional expos.

It would be a shame if this trend continued in the industry. So many benefits would be lost if regional shows were swallowed up by the big guys.

If you've been hoping to attend a show in your area, but are having trouble convincing the powers that be to foot the bill, several angles can help you break down their objections.

Emphasize the educational offerings that continue to build up the professionalism in the industry. If your facility is getting ready to make new equipment purchases, stress the bargains that you can find at these shows. Don't forget to mention the important networking that goes on, and the ways that cooperation will improve your job performance.

Your participation is the only thing that will keep exhibitors coming to the regional shows.

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Tip o' the Month

Fall Into Action

by Perry Douglas, OPEI

Turning leaves and turning engines go hand in hand each fall. According to the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), proper maintenance can help prevent the trouble and expense of unexpected repairs and extend the life of your equipment. OPEI has issued the following fall maintenance tips:

All outdoor power equipment

- Read the owner's manual and follow its instructions for proper maintenance.
- Always turn off the engine and disconnect the spark plug, unplug the equipment, or remove the battery before you begin any maintenance work.
- Handle gas carefully. Fill up before you start, while the engine is still cold.
- Regularly check the engine oil.
- Check all nuts, bolts, belts, and screws for tightness.
- Check that engine-cooling fins are clean with every operation.

Lawn mowers

- Regularly check belts/chains for wear and tightness.
- Check that pull cords are not frayed, and that they're in working condition.
- Make sure throttle control is properly adjusted.
- Check blades for sharpness, and make sure cutting deck is clean.

Hand-held leaf blowers and edgers

- Use high-quality engine oil that's specifically designed for two-cycle hand-held equipment (if applicable). Fuel stabilizers can help fuel maintain high-octane level for longer periods, providing easier starting and cooler engine performance.
- Make sure all intake vents are clear.
- Before using, carefully balance and adjust the equipment for operator comfort and safety. □

OPEI is a trade association whose membership is primarily composed of manufacturers of powered lawn and garden maintenance products, components, attachments, and services.