

Traffic survey update

The most frequently asked question I receive still involves how much traffic is too much traffic. You seem to seek the same information but from different angles. As managers of the field you seek data or recommendations that you can throw back at the boss or user group that basically says that the fields are being used too much and that is why it is impossible to keep any reasonable amount of turf cover on the field. The boss or those involved with scheduling events are usually faced with too many scheduled events and too few fields. Their motivation is often revenue driven since more tournaments and user groups mean more dollars to keep the facility operational. The most forward thinking city planners seek the magic number of fields that will be needed to support current and projected growth by their community.

Over the past 4 years we have been collecting survey information relating field use to field performance. The survey form and field evaluation form can be found at <http://turfgrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/traffic.pdf>. Nearly 300 surveys were completed by sport field managers of soccer and football fields across the entire US. Field use ranged from eight events for professional football to 656 events for youth groups. Because of field use diversity we are now developing a person hour model that is sport and age group specific.

PLEASE CONTACT ME IF YOU HAVE BEEN COLLECTING FIELD USE DATA BY HOURS AND USER GROUP. I would like to have your input in developing the new person hour survey.



Annual number of events per field	Avg	Range
Total	125	8-656
Breakpoint # of events until field will not recover	79	4-475
Maximum # of events but field will recover	64	2-325

Data collected from 300 soccer and football fields across the entire US ranging in age from youthgroups to professional sports.

The survey provides general guidelines and is the best information I have to offer until the sport specific person hour survey is completed. On average an individual field is receiving 125 events per year. A field receiving over 79 events should not be able to recover to an acceptable level. Most sports turf managers feel they could maintain an acceptable field if the annual event schedule were less than 64 events.

These are not magic numbers for all situations. For example, at the college or professional level a stadium field will not tolerate 64 events and still be acceptable for that type of competition. On the other hand a city planner looking for the number of fields to build for youth soccer can use the 64 to 79 event schedule as a planning tool for developing the appropriate number of fields for their community. Some facilities even had successful turf at the end of 150 events.

There are many variables in the traffic management game that may cause you to tolerate more or fewer events on your specific field. Variables include; warm/cool season climate, soil type, grass selection, irrigation, cultivation, seeding/sodding renovation, etc. If you are going to make a case to regulate activity on specific a specific field you would be better off using your own internal measurements that reflect field activity and performance instead of blindly accepting

these broad national averages presented here.

To regulate field use and improve playing performance it is more important to evaluate your specific fields relative to your specific type of traffic load and level of management. Most sports turf managers intuitively do this, but I bet you don't have a per field record of activity and playing quality throughout the year that documents when the field has had too much traffic. Without this type of data it will be difficult to limit field use or to plan the appropriate number of fields when building for future growth. Use the field evaluation form at the website address above to rate your fields each month and combine this with accurate field use records on a person/hour or field/hour basis to develop a picture relating field performance to user group activity.

Put another way, quit crying about all the activity on your fields and give your administrators some information to make sound decisions. Get off the mower, take off your hat, shine your boots, and take a season's worth of information to your boss. This is a great exercise to build communication with your administration and user groups, even if you don't have high traffic issues at your facility. With this type of information you will be viewed as part of the solution, not part of the problem.

An appropriate amount of funding must be channeled to grounds management to off set field damages from high use. In cases of extreme field activity there may be no level of funding that will keep the fields from wearing out and your only recourse is to close the fields for re-vegetation. Develop written strategic guidelines that include; anticipated field performance, measured level of activity and turf quality rating system per field, and a field maintenance budget that includes closing a field for re-vegetation if needed?

In my next column I'll share the individual success stories and strategies that you have relayed dealing with specific traffic problems such as, coaches who don't spread the traffic, playing games when it is too wet, field rotation, and the band. Drop me a line so I can reference your solution to the difficult problem of traffic troubles.

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QUESTIONS? Send them to Dave Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or email dminner@iastate.edu. Or, send them to Grady Miller at the University of Florida, PO Box 110670, Gainesville, FL 32611, or email gmler@mail.ifas.ufl.edu.