Using weather info for safety and turf maintenance

These case studies describe how the athletic departments at University of Georgia and University of Oklahoma use daily weather information for public safety and field upkeep and maintenance purposes.

University of Georgia

Located in Athens, the University of Georgia boasts more than 33,000 students, 368 campus buildings, 614 acres of land, and a total workforce of more than 9,500 employees. Founded in 1785, the university is the first state-chartered university in the United States, and home to the Georgia Bulldogs. A member of the Southeastern Conference, the university offers nine men's varsity sports, 12 women's varsity sports, and has won 18 national championships in its athletic history.

In his role as assistant head of athletic grounds, Paul "Waldo" Terrell maintains 17 acres of turf for the university's outdoor athletic fields and facilities. As the individual responsible for planning the irrigation, fertilization, mowing, pesticide application, and game preparation schedules, Terrell's success relies on the weather and planning accordingly.

"Everything we do and the schedules we create rely on the weather," Terrell said. "The more weather information we can get, the better. We don't want to waste money on chemical applications and paint to see them washed away by rain two hours later."

MxVision WeatherSentry Turf Edition Online gives Terrell accurate weather information for operational decisions including: StormPath technology that provides an animated pictures of predicted rainfall over the next 72 hours; up-to-the-minute local and regional weather forecasts; current and future radar capabilities; real-time lightning data; and PrecipTimer, which lets you know when the rain will start and how long it's going to last.

"With all the hurricanes this region has seen this year, our Turf Edition Online has been very helpful," Terrell said. "In fact, thanks to forecasts we received on the system, one week we moved up plans to paint the field in Sanford Stadium by two days. By painting it on Tuesday instead of Thursday, we didn't waste 100 gallons of paint, and the field was painted and ready for the game on Saturday."

The Lightning Manager, which monitors lightning as it approaches your area and sounds alarms when a strike occurs within your designated zone, proved particularly helpful one day.

"Game Operations and the Event Management Office use the real-time lightning information we get for fan safety purposes," said Terrell. "One day during a soccer game, Lightning Manager was warning of storms and lightning in the area. Thanks to this information, they were able to clear the stands at the game before any fans were affected."

"The first thing I do each day is check out the Turf Edition Online for the latest forecasts and weather information. I especially like the fact that I can check it from home. I would certainly recommend it to anyone," said Terrell.

University of Oklahoma

Founded by the Oklahoma Territory Legislature in 1890, the University of Oklahoma in Norman is a doctoral degree-granting research university with 19 colleges that enrolls more than 30,000 students. With 16 NCAA Division 1 sports teams, the university maintains many athletic facilities, including Gaylord Family - Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, home of the Sooners football team. With a capacity of 82,112, the stadium ranks as one of the largest, most-recognized venues in college football.

Since taking over as the University of Oklahoma's athletic turf and maintenance director in 1999, Kenny Gajewski is responsible for maintaining all of the athletic fields and outdoor facilities on the university's campus. With a crew of seven full-time grounds workers and five full-time maintenance workers, Gajewski's schedule is often dependent on the weather.

"The weather can impact a lot of what we do and when we do it," he said. "To be effective, we constantly need to know what the weather forecast is and when the rain and storms will arrive in our area."

With their subscription to MxVision WeatherSentry Turf Edition, the University of Oklahoma receives up-to-the-minute local and regional weather forecasts, current and future radar capabilities, real-time lightning data and StormPath technology that provides an animated picture of predicted rainfall over the next 72 hours.

"We refer to our system throughout the day for the latest radar and forecasts," said Gajewski. "If we have a time frame of when the weather will hit, we know how much time we have to finish a project or get the crews inside. The weather can also impact scheduling of watering and employees, so we need accurate, continuous information."

Two MxVision WeatherSentry Turf Edition features that have proven to be beneficial for Gajewski are PrecipTimer and Lightning Manager. "One day we were scheduled to play UTEP in football, and because of the forecasts on our WeatherSentry, we knew there was a good chance of rain," he said. "So, we kept an eye on it and when we knew what time the rain would start, we alerted the game officials. We were also notified that there was lightning nearby, so we were able to get the teams off the field and the fans to safety before everything hit."

"The product offers so many options, we use it as a guide for everything we do. Without a doubt, I would recommend it to anyone who needs to have consistent, accurate up-to-the-minute weather information," said Gajewski. ST

Photo courtesy Lisa Hall

Meteorlogix, Minneapolis, MN, supplied this article. See www.meteorlogix.com.