

The 10 Commandments of environmental turf craft

By Kevin Trotta

Editor's note: Kevin Trotta was named the 2006 Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association's Environmental Communicator of the Year for his work in getting out the word about environmental stewardship.

A craft is a marriage of art and science. Today's sports turf manager is fast becoming a fine craftsman, practicing this kind of art informed by science. "Environmental turf craft" is doing things right as well as doing the right things. It is the standard operating procedures of modern sports turf management guided by the underlying principles of environmental responsibility, both personally and collectively within the industry. It is more than a collection of tools and techniques; it's an awareness and a mindset that can, and should, be a part of improving day-to-day operations and evolving long-range strategies.

#1. MAINTAIN DENSE TURF. Bare soil is an environmental problem. Studies show that thick, healthy turfgrass controls runoff and

benefits the environment. So your intensity of maintenance must keep pace with the intensity of use. For the same reasons, compaction and excessive thatch must be addressed.

#2. FOCUS ON THE THREE R'S. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Fine-tune irrigation and nutrients, reduce pesticides with IPM, use some natural organic fertilizers, compost. Does your vehicle go miles per gallon, or gallons per mile? The possibilities go on and on.

#3. DON'T FERTILIZE THE SIDEWALK. Keep all inputs in the grass, not on the hardscape. Scrutinize wash areas, don't spill when you fill, dispose of containers properly, etc. "Give a hoot, don't pollute."

#4. BUDGET FOR STEWARDSHIP. Differentiate between expense and investment. Examples: "good seed doesn't cost, it pays." Controlled release N is environmentally friendlier but costs more.

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#5. **UNDERSTAND MOWING.** "The higher the shoots, the deeper the roots." Deeper-rooted turf requires fewer inputs. Raise clipping heights if and when possible, mow with regularity, and keep sharp blades.

#6. **STAY AWAKE.** Know your site and the materials you use. Watch the weather. Explore new pest management alternatives. Observe and record. Be an expert, and pursue continuing education!

#7. **BUILD PROGRAMS ON KNOWLEDGE, NOT PRODUCTS.** Plans should precede tool selection, not the other way around. Proper culture first! Be guided by the practices and principles of IPM.

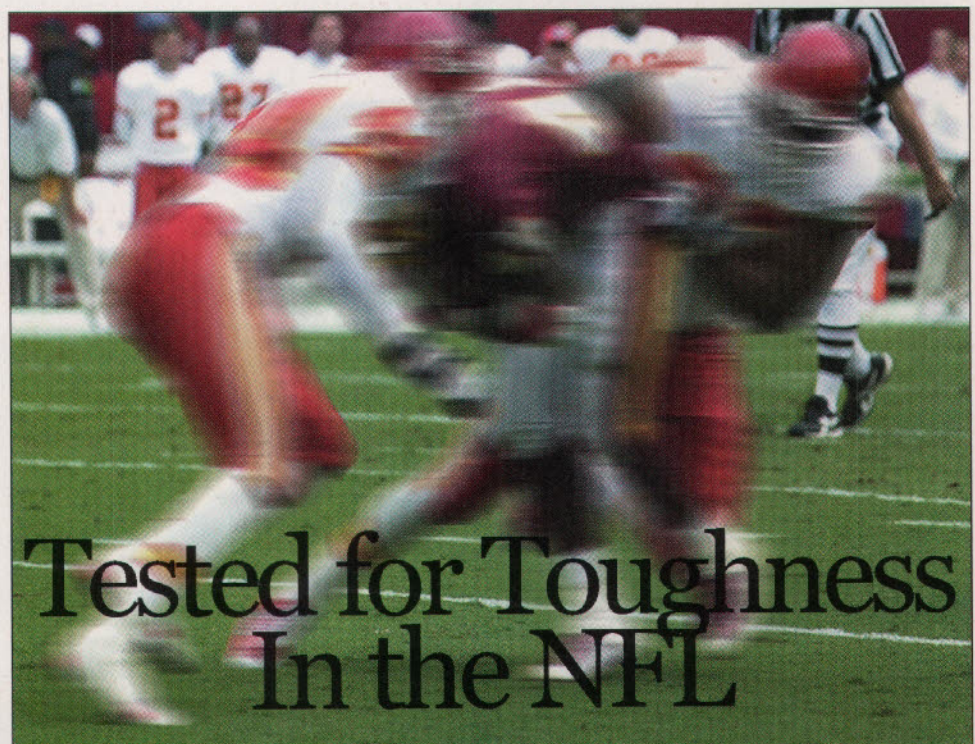
#8. **BE PRECISE.** Comply with environmental rules and regulations. Be a fine craftsman. Measure. Calibrate. Use materials properly. Maintain equipment for peak performance. Accurately identify problems. Do the right things at the right times. When in doubt, find out. Think, plan, think again, then execute.

#9. **BE PASSIONATE.** It's contagious. Care a lot; let everyone know you do. Determine expectations, work to exceed them. Demonstrate our worth and integrity, personally and collectively.

#10. **COMMUNICATE.** Communicate and recruit. Gather support for healthier, safer turf. Explain to the concerned. Talk to your friends and your critics. We must be proactive in reshaping the image of our industry. The most reliable means of being perceived as an environmental steward is to be one.

Kevin Trotta BS, MA, is a turfgrass IPM specialist and is head groundskeeper for the North Rockland Central (NY) School District. He'll be presenting on this topic at January's STMA Conference in San Antonio. ■

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