

Sports turf managers going “green”

By Kevin Meredith, CSFM

The “green movement” describes an awakening of consciousness in regard to how we view, use and conserve the earth’s resources and our environment. Its basis is sustainability, safety and ecological awareness.

We are all involved with the green movement in some way and probably have been unknowing participants for years. If you are pumping 10% ethanol into your gas tank, use more energy efficient fluorescent bulbs, recycle your plastic bottles or your aluminum cans you are part of it. We do things every day that have a positive impact on our quality of life and never give them a thought.

As sports turf managers we have the added responsibility of providing safe playing surfaces while operating under increasingly restrictive regulations. Federal, state and local laws are continuously changing and political pressure from parents and user groups are constantly forcing us to reevaluate how we can do our jobs effectively while still conforming to these regulations and demands.

Over the years I have figured out there are two ways to approach this kind of change: *reactive*, which plays out exactly like it sounds. As situations change and impact how you do things your responses and solutions are the result of having to react to and mitigate a crisis.

But being *proactive* allows you the most control of a situation, where you can anticipate changes and prepare for alternatives. This can take away the surprise factor and avoid crises.

Being aware of your own management style will be a key component in understanding and responding to the ever increasing challenges associated

with environmental stewardship. To find out how turf managers around the country were dealing with going green, I called a few friends along with some randomly selected names from the STMA Membership Directory. I asked them to identify areas in their operation that have changed as a result of an increased awareness of environmental concerns.

It was no surprise to find out that the vast majority of changes have come about because of budgetary pressure and not the result of altruism. One thing that I found to be very interesting was the elevated level of awareness shown by those individuals who have come over to sports turf after being associated with GCSAA. There is something to be said for the quality and quantity of environmental education offered to golf course superintendents.

My first call was to Carol Baker, CSFM at Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, CA. I knew from previous conversations with her at STMA Conferences that she had been involved in the golf industry and that she is environmentally aware. Her greatest challenge is the efficient use of water resources. Using technology developed by the irrigation industry she has been able to greatly improve the efficiency of her water system.



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Carol Baker
CSFM at Mt. San
Antonio College,
Walnut, CA

She has a weather station tied to a Rain Bird Maxicom central control system and uses it to regulate the irrigation on her athletic fields and her landscapes. Carol notes that being an ET based system she is able to feel confident and comfortable with the amount of water being applied.

Carol feels like she is proactive in regard to her green challenges and credits much of that to the time she spent as a golf course superintendent.

I got lucky on my next call by finding a gentleman who has more than 30 years of school district and parks and rec experience. Douglas Johnsen, now with the Valley Center Parks and Rec Department in Encinitas, CA is a man on a mission!



Douglas Johnsen
Valley Center Parks
and Rec Dept.,
Encinitas, CA

When I first spoke with him he was feeling very fortunate about his water situation because growers in the southern California had been forced to reduce their water consumption by 30%. He is under a voluntary stage of water restrictions and is using non-potable water. He constantly monitors his water use to maximize the efficiency of his irrigation system.

Like many other parks and rec managers Doug is also responsible for buildings and parking areas. To help with cooling his building he obtained a grant from his Gas and Electric Company through the Cool Communities Shade Tree Program. This program uses the strategic placement of trees to create shade on buildings to aid in cooling.

He has addressed energy conservation issues by changing light bulbs and reducing the number of lights being used. Thermostats in the buildings have been upgraded to the energy efficient programmable type. Doug also noted that the shift is being made to have all of the new parking lots be made of decomposed granite (DG). DG is permeable, allows runoff to be absorbed and absorbs far less heat than traditional paving surfaces.

He is also being proactive when it comes to his grounds care equipment, shopping a lot harder to find more fuel efficient equipment that will still get the job done. He has changed over to electric hedge trimmers to save fuel and reduce pollution. On other power equipment he is in the process of eliminating 2 stroke engines and replacing them with 4 stroke, enabling the district to meet emission rules.

Finally, Doug reports that one of his biggest challenges has been routing and scheduling of vehicles and maintenance personnel to conserve gas and time. Doug will be happy to answer your questions at dougjohnsen@sbcglobal.net.

Next stop: Phoenix, where David Shilling, a 10-year member of STMA, maintains 45 acres by himself for the Paradise Valley School District at the Shadow Mountain High School. He has no water restrictions at this time but does his best to conserve by monitoring and maintaining the irrigation system. He feels that in the future water issues are going to have to be addressed, for now he is just going to see how it plays out.

The school system has a recycling program in place and has instituted a major cutback in energy usage, in the past they were subsidized but are now footing the entire bill. Part of David's contribution was to go to florescent lighting in his



David Shilling
Paradise Valley
School District,
Shadow Mountain
High School
Phoenix, AZ

shop and try to be more efficient operating his equipment. The IPM program he uses has been in place for years and he is pleased that he isn't playing catch up trying to implement it.

I crossed the country to find Kevin Johnson, turf manager for the City of Deltona, FL. Kevin has always believed in IPM and has always tried to be a good environmental steward, which he credits to his time as a superintendent. This retired US Army drill sergeant tells it like it is. He doesn't believe we could ever go completely organic and still have our fields perform at the



Kevin Johnson
Turf manager
Deltona, FL

levels need to maintain safe fields. He feels that quick recovery is probably the most important factor we need to manage for, without it our fields will take a nose dive and never take the traffic pushed on them.

I have been to his fields and they reflect the passion Kevin has for sports turf management. Ron Randall started at SUNY Oswego in upstate New York 2 years ago. Here are a few of the many changes he has implemented in the grounds department:

- Stopped weekly mowing of a non use turf area that was mowed just for aesthetics. Instead we will bush hog or flail mow it 2X yearly saving fuel and time.
- Shuts vehicles off when possible, no leaving the A/C on in the truck when you stop to use the bathroom. Vehicles are shut off during break and lunch as well, unless they are fighting snow and need to keep defrosters running, etc. In winter they still do what is necessary to safely maintain campus. Started a few test areas where they planted fine fescues in areas that they hope



Ron Randall
SUNY Oswego,
New York

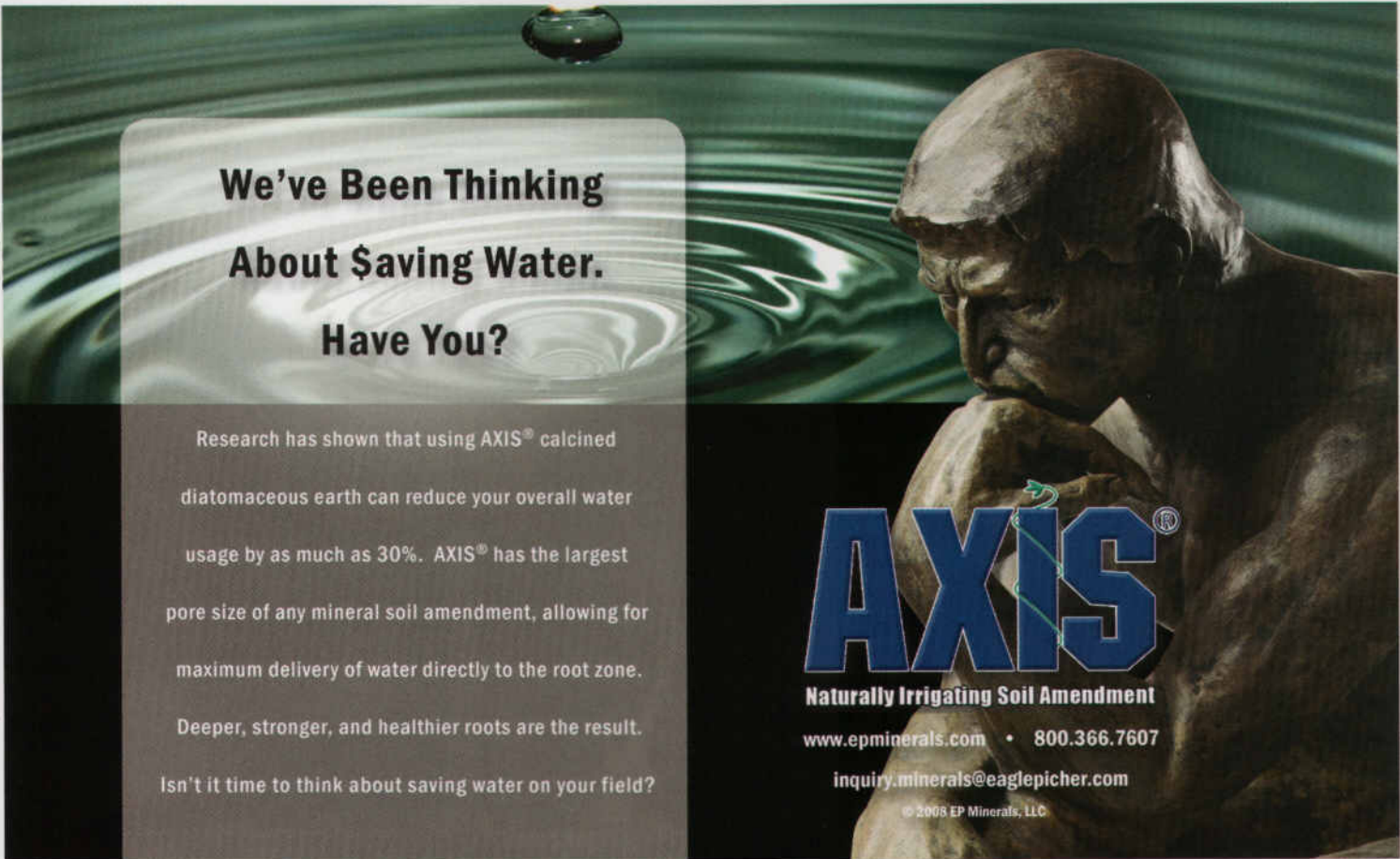
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to not mow. The first area was too small to get a riding mower in and in order to save time and labor they planted the fine fescue blend hoping to start a new aesthetic for areas like this.

• Installed Flexi-pave instead of concrete or blacktop on two small pads and one sidewalk. Flexi-pave is a recycled tire product that works like cement but allows water through. Bought an Electric Toro Workman as a work cart for our athletic fields. Randall believes healthy turf is more environmentally friendly than thin sparse turf so he is trying to gradually improve the overall turf canopy especially on his fields. The thicker and denser the turf, the less bare ground there is, and that means less evaporation of water and cooler turf in the summer. Recycling and purchasing every recycled product they can. Examples include old concrete as fill, tree branches, leaves, paper, metal, cardboard, plastics, and recycled bike racks, etc.)

In our next article we'll meet a passionate turf manager who has developed an incredible plan to meet and address green issues on the campus where he works. ■

Kevin I. Meredith, CSFM is turf manager for the National Soccer Hall of Fame, Oneonta, NY.



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Five tips to readying your résumé

Your résumé is your calling card. It should provide enough information about you to persuade the prospective employer to invite you for an interview. That's it. The total purpose of your résumé is to get your foot in the door for an interview, where you can sell yourself to the interviewer. To make your résumé a most effective tool for your job search, consider these tips:

1. Customize your résumé for the position to which you are applying. The easiest way to do this is in the "Objective," which should be at the top of your first page. For example, let's say your objective is "To be employed by a sports facility that is committed to providing the highest quality fields for its athletes." You find out through the STMA Career Center that a position becomes available at a soccer complex. Then you would change your objective to "... be employed at a **soccer** complex that is committed ..."

2. Use white space. It is okay to have your résumé go to two pages. Two pages are standard, especially if you have any experience. Do not use small type and all available space to present your résumé on one page. You want the prospective employer to read it, so make it easy to read. Be sure to also use an easy to read type style, too. There are hundreds of fun fonts available, but don't use them on your résumé. Again, you want the prospective employer to spend time reading about you, not trying to figure out the words.

3. When describing your previous job responsibilities write in an active voice, showing how your work provided value, and use bullets. For example, don't say, "I was responsible for mowing the football field prior to weekend

games." Instead, say, "Improved football field conditions by implementing a consistent mowing program."

4. Do include your community and professional organizational involvement, but do not include personal information, such as marital status, number of children, religious affiliation or other information that is not relevant to the job.

5. Think about what qualifies you for the job and include it in your résumé, typically under a heading called "Summary of Qualifications." This section can change to meet the requirements that the employer is seeking. It can also be more global and highlight the overall qualities that make you a top sports turf manager and a desirable employee. For example, you might list:

- Certified Sports Field Manager, the credential that validates experience and knowledge, and the commitment to continuing education
- Highly experienced in field renovation
- Strong team management skills
- Bilingual in English and Spanish

Don't confuse the "Qualifications" with your "Accomplishments," which should be another section that highlights the noteworthy activities that you successfully completed. ■

Thanks to STMA Headquarters for this article.



Turf Field Days at Penn State—a great place to network.



Getting the message across

By Diane Stafford

told him what I wanted, but he didn't hear a thing I said.

I left three phone messages but haven't heard back. I don't know what they want.

Every time I try to talk to him, he acts like he has to run somewhere else.

Any of those comments sound familiar?

To quote from "Cool Hand Luke": "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

It takes effective communication to make business run smoothly, but sometimes the message doesn't get through. Whether you're a boss managing a crew, a business owner trying to reach a client, or someone trying to talk to a supervisor, there's a good chance you've hit communication barriers.

We're not talking about language barriers. We're talking about everyday relationships that have static on their communication lines.

There are two parts to any communication: The message sent, and the message received. The sender needs to be clear and direct. The recipient needs to listen. Ideally, the exchange ends when there's mutual understanding.

But this is the real world. People are busy. It's hard to take time to hash out every directive or announcement. But, when the "I told him what I want but he didn't hear a thing I said" scenario drives you nuts it's time for a meeting of the minds.

If what seems to you like clear directions aren't being followed, ask your worker in for a chat. Say something like this: "I feel like you're sometimes

not hearing what I'm saying. For example, when I asked you to (insert the specific, recent failure-to-communicate incident here), that didn't happen. Can you help me understand why we weren't communicating?"

Putting the message in terms of "I feel" or "I need you to" instead of starting out with a "You blew it" tirade can work wonders. Ask the employee to ask you questions if he doesn't understand something. Ask him to tell you if he has personal issues that get in the way of carrying out your directions. Then listen. Communication is a two-way street. Once you hear his side, it's easier to know whether disciplinary steps are the right thing to do.

What about the "I left three phone messages but haven't heard back" situation?

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Try another means of communication. Most people have preferred communication styles. Some would rather talk on the phone. Others find it easier to respond to an email. Still others won't move off the dime without good old face-to-face contact.

Let's say you've just laid sod, hash mark to hash mark, on the middle of the high school football field when you read in the newspaper that the "Tiny Tot Cheerleaders" are scheduled to hold a

camp this weekend on your field. Your work was scheduled in advance. How could the mix-up have happened?

Your district site manager is on vacation. Your voice mail message to the high school cheerleader sponsor hasn't been returned. Don't assume she's ignoring you. Try another communication medium, like email, and reframe your message, perhaps in another voice mail as well. Explain in detail the reason why the camp can't be held on the field. Say

that it's time for solutions, not blame, and offer to help locate an alternative field. Empathizing with the sponsor who's preparing for an onslaught of a hundred 4- to 8-year olds may help her empathize with you and ease what could potentially be an explosive encounter.

And then there's the "Every time I try to talk to him, he acts like he has to run somewhere else" syndrome.

Some people have a bad habit: They don't devote their attention to someone who's speaking to them. Listening is a conscious discipline that some people haven't mastered. Others pull rank and don't give subordinates the same attention they'd give their superiors. It's rude, but what can you do about it?

Here's a technique that may bridge the communication gap when you're trying to talk to someone who's clearly distracted: "Joe, it looks like you're busy with something else. When would be a good time for me to talk to you?"

That approach lets Joe know that he's not paying attention. It puts the ball in his court to say when he'll be ready to listen. Some people will apologize and devote full attention. Others will agree it's not a good time and tell you when it will be.

It's no secret that there are hidden agendas behind some orders. Some seemingly simple declarations have double meanings. What we hear often depends on the background and the context into which we insert them. Also, the words others hear aren't always as clear to them as we think they were when we said them.

Clear communication requires effort. When the effort takes more energy than it's worth, it's time to reassess the work relationship. Sometimes, as Donald Trump showed us, the clearest message is, "You're fired." That may be the end solution for some employees. But for people you can't fire, the only solution sometimes is finding the time to invest in a different way of communicating.

[Editor's note: This is the first in a series of six articles in the new Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing Irrigation have partnered in this series to bring professional development and career issues to the forefront.] ■

Diane Stafford is the workplace and careers columnist at The Kansas City Star. Diane keeps up with the latest workplace news on her blog at www.workspacekc.typepad.com.



Work on the Super Bowl crew!

The Toro Company is again sponsoring its annual Toro Super Bowl Sports Turf Training Program. In January 2009, one lucky student will travel to Tampa Bay to help the grounds crew prepare the field for the Super Bowl.

To be considered for the program, students must submit the application form and a 500-word typed essay describing where they see themselves professionally in five years and what they hope to accomplish during that time. The student must be enrolled in their second year of a two-year turf program or in their junior year of a four-year turf program, and must be available to work from January 25 – February 2, 2009. Entries must be postmarked by November 15, 2008 and the winner will be announced on December 15, 2008. Application forms and complete rules are available online at www.torosports.com/superbowl.