

Tools & Equipment

Readers respond: taking care of equipment maintenance

Editor's note: We asked some readers from around the country three questions: Who does your equipment maintenance? How is that person trained? If you do your own maintenance, where do you get training? Here are selected responses:



We do minor equipment maintenance ourselves, what I like to call “common sense” maintenance. For anything out of our league we send it to the distributor who sold us the piece.

Allan Johnson, Green Bay Packers

Since we are a municipality all of our capital equipment goes to our Fleet Maintenance Dept. for service, based on the unit's hours. None of their employees have special training dealing with turf equipment. Our crew attempts to handle repairs ourselves but if a problem is too complex we turn it over to Fleet Maintenance.

Typically issues can be resolved between the two departments but if we can't do that, we contact the vendor. I would like an in-house mechanic but that won't happen. We are the largest of three sports complexes owned by the city and commonly share equipment if needed to get the job done; likewise with the city's golf course. One big happy family!

Brad West, City of Broken Arrow, OK

We do our own maintenance on our John Deere equipment throughout the year, and then we usually send them out once a year in the winter to have them

serviced by a John Deere Service Center. We usually don't have to do much on our equipment throughout the year, unless something major happens, at which point we send it out.

Derek Hurlburt, Pittsburgh Pirates

We have four mechanics that do most of our equipment maintenance work; they also work on buses and autos for the district. Our turf crew members perform jobs like blade changes, greasing, and regular daily routine work. Warranty work is performed by a local dealer. We send our reels out to a local guy to sharpen yearly, and periodically backlap in our shop.

Three of the four mechanics came to us from auto dealerships, where they received training; periodically they attend training seminars, when we can afford to send them. The fourth guy works on small engines, trimmers, etc., and his training is on the job.

As far as training for our crew, we have occasional, informal sessions with our in-house mechanics, and we have brought in manufacturing reps to conduct classes. A lot of our training is simply word of mouth among us.

Fred Heckle, Rock Hill (SC) School District

All of our equipment maintenance is done by the field mechanic from Toro, our equipment provider. We pay a monthly fee to Toro to have them send their field mechanic out once a week for 4 hours. He does all the maintenance to the equipment: repairs, scheduled maintenance, warranty work, upkeep, etc. If it is broke he fixes it, if it needs to be taken into their shop he takes it there for repairs. He is one of their many trained mechanics. When he is not here, he is out making other field calls. This is much cheaper than hiring a full time mechanic.

Allen Reed, FC Dallas

I have an in-house, certified mechanic from the automotive industry on my staff. We have arranged specific training for turf equipment through local turf equipment dealers and update training when new products or services are adapted.

We also use a computerized maintenance management system to keep records on repair maintenance, usage, labor and parts costs i.e. filters, blades, belts, etc., depreciation, fuel consumption, preventative maintenance schedules and replacement costs.

Chris Lessig, Manheim Township (PA) Parks & Rec

Our major equipment maintenance is performed by a golf course mechanic. He is a baseball fan and we pay him for a portion of his services and trade tickets for the other parts. He has a degree in mechanics and has updated his skills by attending classes and training seminars focused on turf equipment.

The training for the portion of maintenance that we perform on our own has been hands on experience from accomplishing the tasks. We get what we can from our owner's manuals and then call on peers to answer questions when we are stumped. I learned my basic maintenance skills from working on the family farm as I grew up.

Jarad Alley, Albuquerque Isotopes

Our equipment maintenance is done in house and our mechanic was trained at the Utah Valley University small engine program.

I do the day to day maintenance such as change out tines and that sort of thing; the repairs and major adjustments to our equipment is done by our in-shop mechanic.

David Schlotthauer, Brigham Young University

Other than lubing all grease fittings and keeping all mowers clean, I'll solicit the service of our facilities mechanic/technician for service such as oil changes and other light maintenance. We also have a former golf equipment mechanic on staff with Facilities that lends good advice on back-lapping, etc. For reel grinding services and other specialized repair and maintenance, I'll contract with an identified golf course mechanic close by.

I would assume that the three individuals mentioned above were possibly certified to some degree, but relied on on the job training for the most part.

Any training I have is from being mentored by golf course equipment technicians in past

work experiences in Florida and other states.

Brian Cool, Pacific University

Until a year ago we had three methods for doing equipment maintenance. We did minor repairs, preventative maintenance and scheduled services in-house with our own full-time supervisory staff. Major repairs were farmed out to the town's Public Works Department mechanics or to local private sector mechanics.

Luckily, a little over a year ago we were fortunate enough to be able to add a full-time mechanic to our parks division staff. He has a formal mechanic's education, a mechanic's certification and a lifetime of experience working on all kinds of equipment and vehicles. His only limitation is that our maintenance shop does not have all the equipment that a mechanic needs or all the tools, for that matter. When a situation arises where he's faced with these limitations he either takes the equipment to the PW shop or borrows the tools. Although he brought many of his own tools with him when he started work we are slowly building an inventory of tools for him as our budget allows.

Although our budget is tight right now, as is everyone's, we encourage our full-time employees to seek out training opportunities that are applicable to their job and will be of value to the department. For instance, we are hoping to send our mechanic to a training session this fall to familiarize him with the specialty mechanics of working on our Piston Bulley snow groomer that we use to groom Nordic ski trails in the winter.

It has been great having a full-time mechanic. We have noticed less down-time for our equipment which has meant greater productivity in the field in areas such as mowing, trimming and infield preparation. He is responsible for keeping the shop organized and clean which was quite a chore before, as you can imagine, with 10 or 15 young seasonal employ-

ees coming and going all day. He has relieved our field supervisors of having to come out of the field to fix equipment so that they now can more closely oversee field operations, which has improved accountability and quality of work amongst our seasonal staff. He is keeping accurate service records which enables him to do timely servicing and preventative maintenance which in turn prevents equipment breakdowns and adds longevity to our equipment thus reducing the stress on our capital equipment replacement budget.

Al Zuckerman, Teton County (WY) Parks & Rec

We perform our own equipment maintenance. We have two in-house mechanics that work on the University vehicles as well as our turf maintenance equipment. The two mechanics came into the positions with experience from the automotive industry.

We currently rely on our equipment vendors for any additional training that we would need to keep us up to date on new technical information. I believe that preventative maintenance is the key to a successful turf equipment program.

Matt Clement, Roger Williams University

We do 95% of the maintenance on our fleet using our in-house grounds staff. We service and repair 235 pieces of equipment from our Grounds Shop. These pieces include everything from aerial lifts to z-mowers.

All 6 of our groundskeepers assist with equipment maintenance in one way or another. I am primarily responsible for coordinating maintenance on the fleet. Two of our other younger groundskeepers have been developing into and working to take over most of that role over the last year.

We have tended to hire people who have a natural mechanical aptitude to begin with and also a desire to learn and grow. It's really

a learn-as-you-go environment for us. Mentorship is a key aspect to our program.

We attend workshops and dealer training as those opportunities are available. We use internet resources extensively in addition to the local library, television programs and networking connections to others in the industry that can mentor us to learn and expand our knowledge. We purchase full service manuals for all of our equipment to reference and learn from.

Here are additional thoughts on the guidelines of our program and what makes it effective:

- Preventative Maintenance (PM)—equipment is serviced according to factory service schedules or better. All equipment is assessed and service at least 1x/yr. Our goal is to have no comeback.
- Routine inspections by an outside party for things such as aerial lifts.
- PM scheduled as follows: ballfield equipment (Jan/Feb), aerial lifts (Feb), mowing equipment, trailers (March), snow equipment (Sept/Oct), trucks (Oct/Nov).
- Equipment assigned to one principal operator as much as possible. (This fosters a sense of accountability and ownership.)
- Provide resources to get the job done. (Includes tools, manuals, internet access, shop, networking opportunities, etc.)
- A good PM program makes it easier for staff to perform their jobs with good equipment and higher quality work can be performed. It presents a good image to the public and shows a responsible work force that takes pride in what they do. It also creates a better self-image and sense of worth for the employee, since they know that they are considered valuable enough to be trusted with the best equipment.

Kenny Nichols, Westerville (OH) City Schools ■