

Q&A



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Questions?

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Are you asking the right question?

The questions we ask, not the answers we seek, often show us the way. We focus on a specific aspect of sports turf management until a task is completed or a problem is solved. We are driven and that is good.

For me it is the high traffic sections of fields that get worn to dust. I make it a goal to hit every traffic-related talk at the STMA National Conference and there were several good ones last month. But I also noticed a profound change that shows the awareness and growth of STMA. The general public is beginning to recognize the sports turf manager as a dedicated professional that honestly cares about the players who compete on their fields. But what they don't realize is that many sports turf managers also have a real affinity for preserving and protecting the land we live and play upon.

Kevin Trotta (turfipmguy@aol.com), Mary Owen (mowen@umext.umass.edu), Kevin Mercer (ksmercerc@smcm.edu), and Roger Miller (rmiller@blackhawk.edu) gave excellent presentations on sustainable and eco-friendly practices that sports turf managers can implement at their facilities. A first step for many may need to be backward. Look away from the fields and toward everything you do off the field for a moment. You may be the steward of a considerable piece of property that requires many resources and accumulates much waste. How would today's society grade your environmental report card?

Many sport facilities contain considerable acreage that is not specifically used for traditional sports. Does the water that flows onto your property leave cleaner than it arrived? Where do all those drains go and what is in them? Are you the steward of the water while it is on your property? Are bioswales, containment areas, and roof/rain gardens part of your water management plan?

We know all about the cleats that trample our field but do we know anything about the carbon foot print we leave on the earth? Before stepping from the shop to the grass you can reduce your carbon foot print by recycling. Here is a great publication from our friends in the

golf industry to get you started: "Golf Course Pollution Prevention Guide" (<http://www.iwrc.org/downloads/pdf/golfcourse04.pdf>).

Many of our fields require intense maintenance for their intended use: to sustain a safe playing surface. Let's take mowing for example. Mowing increases our carbon foot print because it requires fuel and creates carbon emissions. Do double-cutting and mowing intricate patterns unnecessarily increase the carbon foot print? This is offered as an example, not a judgment. Asking the right question shows that you are beginning to understand the role sports turf can play in a sustainable society.

Another great organization to partner with is the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. There are more than 500 golf courses certified in this program but only a few athletic facilities. I know this program and it is a perfect fit for many athletic facilities across the country. The program includes: site assessment and environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, water, resource management, and certification. Upon certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, you and your facility will be immediately recognized for your stewardship within the community and that is a good thing for the sports turf industry. Contact Jim Sluiter, 518-767-9076 or jsluiter@auduboninternational.org or check out the website to get started (<http://acsp.auduboninternational.org/>).

The four work horses listed above are certainly leading the way toward sustainable sports fields and I want to give a special shout out to STMA member Kevin Mercer and his Saint Mary's College of Maryland team for becoming a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary (see July 2009 *SportsTurf* p. 24). Kevin's facility is about 70 miles from where I grew up in Seaford, DE. It is nice to know that he is SUSTAINING that precious estuary around the Chesapeake Bay. I'll be back in late summer for some soft shell crabs; a couple 6-inch peelers on white bread will do me just fine, Kevin—and I'm buying. ■



Illustration courtesy of istockphoto.com