The new normal?

We keep hearing people say the expression, “the new normal”. In terms of sports turf management, what does that mean to you?

Missouri Turfgrass Meeting attendee

I have also been hearing this expression on a regular basis—almost always in reference to our current situation as a result of a poor economy. It has become so overused that I personally dislike the phrase almost as much as the now infamous, “We have to do more with less.”

First, let’s define normal. The statistician in me suggests that the word normal is an indirect reference to the concept of a normal distribution. A normal distribution is when there is an expect value (or a mean) around which there are observations distributed more or less equally below and above the mean. When looked at as a graph, the result is a “bell-shaped curve.” One standard deviation accounts for about 68% of the observations closest to the mean. Two standard deviations account for 95% of the observations. A new normal distribution could have different means and/or different standard deviations. So, basically a new norm would be an experience that is very different than before and/or an extreme experience well outside a typical expectation.

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Different types of “new normal” may be the extremes in weather and the socio-economic present. Companies that have turf products are to succeed with our new normal. We will continue to have a normal of shifts in what was considered normal. We will continue to have to adjust how we do our jobs, keeping our standards and user groups in mind. The often quoted American Senator Everett Dirksen once said, “I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, the first of which is to be flexible at all times.” I believe that is an approach we should all consider adopting if we are to succeed with our new normal.

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The shift in the norm may not have a direct cause. For instance there has been a domino effect in sports that has influenced the sports turf manager’s norm. The best examples related to budget reductions. In many cases game attendance at sporting events has suffered due to the economic situation of the fans. Some have either lost their jobs or have the threat of a lost job. The result is that many people are spending a greater percentage of their household income on food, clothing, and shelter and less on items viewed as non-essential. A significant drop in average attendance results in lower revenue, so field managers have seen budgets reduced in response to the new attendance average. The same may be true of in terms of parents paying for their kids to participate in sports.

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