

## Check-up on equipment maintenance:

interview with Erik Sides of the Equipment & Engine Training Council

*Editor's note: Erik Sides is the executive director of the Equipment & Engine Training Council, York, SC, eetc@eetc.org.*



**SportsTurf:** What are the three most important routine (daily or monthly) maintenance tasks turf managers should do with their mowers?

**Sides:** Really simple here; each manufacturer usually has a daily/monthly/yearly check list of maintenance items to check. If we set aside some time to check these items as indicated by the manufacturer maintenance check list we could prevent a lot of headaches in the future.

**Check fluid levels** as suggested by manufacturer. Example: checking fluid levels as required would help us identify if the unit is leaking/using oil early on. A lot of times a leak or issue internally starts out small and gradually gets worse with more use. If we identify the loss of fluid early on it can save headaches and budget dollars.

**Check for loose/worn/damaged components/parts/hardware.** Example: This really becomes important on hydraulic driven mowers, chaffed/nicked or kinked hydraulic hoses. Generally these damaged hoses will burst when mowing the ball field or prize area causing damage to the turf.

**Operator awareness/training.** Although this is not on the maintenance checklist, having a well trained operator that stays alert of the unit and his or her surroundings is well worth the time and investment. Operators should be trained on proper operation but also about the warning indicator lamps/alarms and gauges. An alert operator trained what to do in case of an alarm or indicator light can prevent altogether or lessen the damage that may occur.

All manufacturers have an Operator Manual that details operation procedures and details what alarms and warning indicators are and what to do when is activated. If you do not have the manual search the manufacturer's website and download the manual. Develop a training program to cover each type of unit you have in your fleet. This can save not only maintenance budget but also has the liability risk to it as well.

**ST:** Is there something turf managers can do a few times annually that will increase life and performance of mowers?

**Sides:** Follow recommend fluid change intervals as per the manufacturer recommendations; if you pay close attention you may see a little statement that says (In Extreme/Dusty working conditions change fluids at XXX). Extreme working conditions could be high ambient temperatures (xx) degrees, or under a heavy load for long periods of time, etc. If the fluids operate in extreme temperatures they will need to be changed more often.

The air intake system is another one that may be overlooked. Look for loose/damaged air intake hoses/clamps/housing and change the filter at least once a year if not more. Follow manufacturers' recommended change intervals. Do not blow the air filter off with compressed air or bang up against something to clean. This will damage the filter medium and or damage the seals, replacing the filter is always best. Do not remove the filter/cover to check filter condition if equipped with a filter condition indicator. This keeps the possibility of dirt being intro-

duced into the unit. Engines and dirt do not mix well and is expensive when it does happen.

One other item to be sure of is when washing the unit, **it should be shut off.** I have seen bent piston rods where water was sucked in while engine was running.

**ST:** How large of an operation, like a college or school district, do you think can support having an in-house mechanic?

**Sides:** That's hard to say because of so many variables but looking at the annual maintenance budget and what is out-sourced vs. what is done in house would be a good start in making that decision. If you have had to replace complete units because of poor maintenance then this may be also be a deciding factor.

Some dealers do offer a yearly maintenance service program that can be used for smaller fleets but someone still needs to have the ability to perform the daily maintenance checks and setups suggested by the manufacturer.

**ST:** What's your advice for keeping smaller equipment like trimmers running their best?

**Sides:** Keeping the filter clean and the fuel quality. Ethanol in fuel has shortened the shelf life of gasoline. When moisture develops over time issues with small equipment take place causing idling issues, weak performance or no start conditions. This then becomes quite expensive for repair if not caught early.

Keep the fuel treated with a quality fuel stabilizer like Ethanol Shield year round. This will protect the fuel system from stale fuel as well as protect it from the harmful effects of ethanol.

**ST:** In your experience what are the most costly mistakes people make when it comes to equipment maintenance?

**Sides:** 1. Not having a plan (maintenance checklist). 2. Not following through (routine, routine, routine). 3. Not keeping accurate records (tracking parts used, hours when serviced etc.) 4. Not following proper procedures (can lead to more expense or liability exposure). ■