

not as demanding on the field as the spring game schedule. However, it is important to remember that the field condition entering the winter will be the same as the field condition during the start of the baseball/softball season, especially for college fields. College baseball/softball can start as early as February 15 and if the weather is nice they will be on the field. The spring schedule for high school usually starts later in the spring since the high school season continues in the summer after classes have ended.

- Skin areas are often left to fend for themselves during the winter. Strong winds can blow the infield dirt materials into the adjacent grass areas and cause large lips to build up during the winter. Boards or silt fence have been used to reduce blowing dirt. Another simple method described by Luke Yoder, Pittsburg Pirates, is to lay down 2-by-4 boards along the dirt infield and adjacent to the grass where the lip usually starts to form. Lay the boards flat and stake them if needed. The dirt piles up on the boards and is easily removed in the spring.
- Some high schools disk the skin area and leave it rough all winter. This works fine if you don't need the field until late spring. If you disk the skin area in the fall and need to have the field ready for play in March, you could have a problem. The worked-up infield will hold water and it may be impossible to drag and firm the surface until the surface has dried.
- Mound and batter box areas should be reconditioned in the fall and then covered with a tarp for the winter. Pull the tarp off in the spring and you are ready to go.
- Sod worn areas in front of the mound and at first and third so they will be ready in the spring.
- Avoid using non-selective soil sterilant herbicides on skin areas to prevent weed growth in skin areas. It is likely that these materials will field their way into the surrounding turf areas and cause injury.

The most important part of your fall program is to have a plan. Don't just drop the field after the last fall game and then try to get ready for next year in the middle of the summer. Autumn is the best time to prepare the field for the rest of the year and be sure that you implement your "putting the field to bed program" immediately after your last fall game. ▲


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"Getting Equipment Ready to go"

by Gilbert Pena, Marketing Manager, Commercial Mowing, John Deere Turf Care & Steve and Suz Trusty, Trusty & Associates

While many of us will put our mowing equipment to bed for the winter, others will continue in the snow removal season. As you finish storing mowing equipment, go ahead and get snow removal equipment ready to go for that first surprise storm.

A pre-season service for two-cycle machines should start with fresh fuel and oil. To prevent the engine from running hot, make sure to have a proper fuel/oil ratio mix. For models that don't require a fuel/oil mixture, add fresh fuel. Each model's operator's manual will have the exact measurements.

Check the belts on the drive mechanism to ensure that they still move freely and haven't hardened. If the belts have hardened, they're more likely to break during a job, leaving your customer with downtime.

Don't forget to lubricate, adjust and inspect all moving parts and safety devices before the first use of the season. Safety shields and guards should be in good shape and fastened in place.

To minimize chute clogging, try spraying slip-plate lubricant onto the surface of the chute.

For walk-behind snow removal equipment, make sure that the operator presence system is engaged.

Don't forget about safety. Take the opportunity to remind all operators of important safety precautions. Shop safety posters, for example, are an ideal way to inform your employees and customers about safe operating habits. Those practices include blowing snow away from people, parked cars and buildings; never putting hands in the discharge chute to unclog snow or debris and wearing protective eyewear and clothing. Again, since all models have specific safety features, refer to your operator's manuals for important seasonal safety tips.

Tackling the Equipment

Once the turf preparations for winter have been completed, it's time to concentrate on preparing the equipment. At the end of the mowing season, one of the worst things you can do to a mower of handheld product is to simply "put it up" until the next season. Proper store affects its useful life and reliability.

First and foremost, prepare eh fuel system for storage.

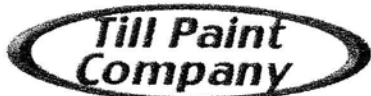
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If left over long periods of time, fuel can deteriorate and turn into a gel or paste-like substance that will clog the fuel lines and varnish the carburetor. You can either run the fuel completely out of the engine, or rotate the fuel shutoff valve and run until the engine dies to empty the carburetor so it doesn't gum up. If you have a full tank of gas left and don't want to burn it unnecessarily, you can add a fuel stabilizer and run the engine for about 10 minutes to ensure that the stabilizer has been mixed with the fuel.

Change the oil and the oil filter (if equipped). True, the fresh oil will just sit over the off-season, but it will provide you and opportunity to examine the oil system for any contaminants. If you see anything unusual, you can have the problem repaired during normal downtime and prevent a slow start to the next mowing season. When changing the oil, if you notice milky oil or a shiny sludge in the filter, it is a sign of coolant leakage. If the oil smells burned, it is a sign of overheating. Put a dab of oil on a paper towel: A lighter stain "halo" around the darker stain indicates fuel in the oil. You may also be able to smell the fuel in the filter.

Servicing the air filter system at the end of the mowing season is especially important, if you plan to also use your mowing equipment for fall-cleanup activities such as mulching leaves. Using a mulching mower or a vacuum system makes leaf cleanup quick, but it's also a very tough environment for engines. The powdery residue, dust and debris can clog the air filter and prevent the machine from working at optimum power. When checking the air filter at such frequent intervals, special care needs to be taken not to break the seal and allow dirt and debris into the engine. To reduce the risk of additional contaminants, watch the air restriction indicator and wipe the area thoroughly before opening the system. Once the system is open, take advantage of the opportunity to inspect for any possible problems. Check intake hoses and the fill canister. Look for cracks, missing washers, seals and loose connections.

It's also recommended to service the spark plug. Remove the spark plug and put 1 ounce of oil in each cylinder. The oil creates a barrier to protect the cylinder wall and makes for easier starting next mowing season. Reinstall the plug, but leave the plug wire off. Then crank or turn the engine over five to six times to ensure that the oil coats the cylinder walls evenly.

Additionally, make sure to remove the battery, if applicable. Clean and charge as necessary, then store in a cool, dry place where it won't freeze. Removing the battery reduces sources of unintentional engine ignition and will help prolong battery life. If you have a hydrostatic unit, relieve the hydraulic pressure to prevent leakage.

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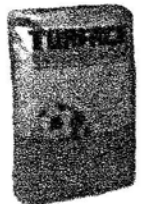
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Before putting your equipment away for the season, take time to do a thorough inspection of all safety shields, belts, hoses and hardware to make sure all are present and in good repair. Lubricate all cables and linkages to prevent seizing over the cold season. You can wait to sharpen or replace blades on mowing equipment until the next mowing season. A freshly sharpened blade can rust, requiring yet another sharpening at the beginning of the next season. Clean debris from around the engine cooling fins and then wash. Paint any scratched or roughed up areas to prevent rust. Coating exposed areas with a protective spray such as Fluid Film is also recommended. Then store the equipment in a dry place, or cover the unit(s) to protect from the weather.

Not only can taking the time to store your outdoor powered equipment properly add longevity to your equipment fleet, but it can also help identify potential problems that can be corrected in the off-season. ▲



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