

Building a Better Toolbox-Tools You Can Use! - Part 4

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The Best Management Practices Toolset- Tools for heading problems off at the pass.

Best Management Practices (BMP's) can be defined as a common sense, practical sequence of procedures using the best available science and technology to protect, maintain and sustain a healthy, functional landscape while providing good stewardship of valuable resources. In the context of sports field or grounds management, it means doing the little things right to get the greatest effect. As we begin to become more educated about Integrated Pest Management and its impact on our daily work lives, we can reflect how certain things that were one common place (such as applying pesticides) now have certain restrictions. Best Management Practices are simply just "doing the next right and responsible thing" to the grounds or the sports field to cause a favorable and beneficial response. BMP's as tools minimize the need for applying additional inputs (seed or sod, fertilizers, pesticides and water), save money, and help the environment.

Of all of the BMP's, mowing is a good place to start. It is one task that all sports field or grounds managers deal with at least weekly. Turf mown incorrectly predisposes it to stress, disease, weed pressures, poor appearance and even death. On the other hand, turf mown correctly will look better, be healthy and not require as many inputs. The last issue of UPDATE featured an article by Dr. Jim Murphy from Rutgers "Evaluating Your Sports Turf Mowing Program." Dr. Murphy's article explained how proper mowing BMP's, that is, proper mowing height for the species, mowing frequency and the 1/3rd rule, contribute to the overall health and vigor of the turf. Murphy went on to explain the consequences for not adhering to these practices. It is more economical to mow properly than to just hack.

Another good BMP is species selection. Consider the intended use of the turf and match it to the species. What kind of turf would grow best on the area in question, and would it survive the natural and manmade conditions of the site? Pick the right grass type and you might find that you will spend less on inputs. The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) evaluates turfgrasses and rates them. Check out their website www.ntep.org for more information.

Consider how you fertilize. If you have the soil tested routinely, and follow a nutrient management plan (fertilizer amounts and timing) you can provide the turf with only the nutrients that it needs and save money because you won't be buying nutrients that are already in abundance in the soil. Proper timing and handling can save money and make the application more efficient. Practices such as avoiding applications on frozen soil or just before a thunder-shower are common sense. Remember, the idea is to get the nutrients into the soil to the roots, not to lose them in the environment from runoff or erosion.

Create a pest management plan for weeds, insects and diseases. Do you set economic thresholds for diseases or pests and the damage that they cause? At what point do you make the decision to treat? How much damage can you tolerate? Would you consider changing your management practices (i.e. mowing height or time of day of irrigation) if it could minimize the severity of an outbreak?

Many state governments suggest numerous BMP's concerning irrigation and its counterpart runoff. Improper irrigation practices and poorly thought-out drainage and sediment

runoff waste valuable water and soil resources and contributes to non-point source pollution of nitrogen and phosphorus in our waterways. Simple BMP's such as adjusting sprinklers to avoid watering impervious surfaces such as roadways and parking lots, or irrigating in the early morning hours to minimize disease activity enhance your management program.

Best Management Practices are guidelines. Many BMP's are site specific. The point is, BMP's will save time, money and make better results possible. As a responsible professional, that is your collateral. Enjoy the toolset.

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