

Maximizing Maintenance Efficiency

By Blake Meentemeyer, agronomist, West Region

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A frequent comment heard during recent [Course Consulting Service](#) visits is that superintendents are having difficulty filling maintenance staff positions. When crews are not at full force, superintendents must focus on maximizing maintenance efficiency. The following ideas were shared during a recent visit with David Ahlstrand, golf course superintendent at Mile Square Golf Course in Fountain Valley, Calif.



One method to improve efficiency is the use of a nonselective herbicide to reduce labor hours associated with string trimming.

1. **Herbicides** – Nonselective and preemergence herbicides can be used to suppress turfgrass and weed growth around tree bases and other areas, thus saving significant labor costs associated with frequent string trimming. Spraying around sprinkler heads in roughs – especially on courses with fast-growing, stoloniferous bermudagrass and kikuyugrass – can reduce the need for edging. The labor hours saved can be used elsewhere.
2. **Growth regulators** – Growth regulation can reduce clipping yield by as much as 50 percent. In addition to greens, tees, and fairways, growth regulators can be used in thick and dense rough areas. Mowing frequency

can be reduced and clippings properly dispersed with less clumping. Power brushes mounted on rear rollers also can aid clipping dispersion.

3. **Avoid stripe patterns** – When there is an opportunity to mow ahead of play, the fastest way is to use the “half-moon” pattern. Using a fairway mowing unit, mow down the right side of the fairway and then up the left side until the middle area is reached. Reserve the “wow factor” for special events and tournaments as described in [Form vs. Function](#). To prevent damage to the turf, the mowers should not be turned around in the same spot at the ends of the fairways.
4. **Do not over fertilize** – Growth regulation via fertility management will help reduce excessive clipping yield and limit the amount of clipping dispersion needed. There is no rule stating that material must be applied evenly across the entire golf course.
5. **Start the crew early** – Public golf courses have the greatest challenge when preparing the course for play each day. Patrons at Mile Square Golf Course in southern California arrive early in the morning and begin their rounds right at sunrise. How is it possible for the crew to perform maintenance tasks ahead of play? The only option available for David Ahlstrand and his team is to start work at 4:00 a.m. Utilizing a work schedule that is organized and straightforward will avoid confusion and improve time management.
6. **Opt for alternate lunch breaks** – David’s crew alternates lunch breaks to keep mowing units consistently moving ahead of play.
7. **Communicate with the golf shop staff** – The superintendent and the golf shop staff should be in constant communication regarding updates and start times on the inward – i.e., back – nine.

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