

Back to the Grind After the GIS Show

Welcome back to the grind of another golf season. Spring time shows us why we do what we do through the winter. By now much of the newly revitalized equipment is already being used four to five days a week. Hopefully all of the operators, new and existing, went through the proper training or retraining on the equipment. Often it's hard to get this done when we want. The sudden growth of the turf and other demands out on the course itself can cause the safety training to be put off until a rainy day.

All technicians should replace safety interlock switches on a regular, preventative maintenance schedule which is recommended by the manufacturer. Keep this in mind: the safety system is not guaranteed past the day it was installed. If the machine is out there again, today, running and cutting just as sweet as we want, it does not mean that the seat switch is working or that the mow shut-down interlock is performing as designed. Sometimes we find things out the hard way. For instance, sometimes an operator is walking back to the shop, because his tri-plex greens mower drove itself into a bunker, or worse, a pond.

First be grateful that no one was hurt, and then get the description of what happened. Bottom line is that the interlocks cannot be taken for granted. Ever. The operator becomes accustomed to the way a machine acts day to day. It's not on his mind whether or not the seat switch may be faulty on any given day at any given time of day.

I had an eye opening experience at the Golf Industry Show last February. The GCSAA and TETA sponsored another educational session at the GIS. I once again want to thank the Toro Company for having Mr. Bud Christopher present "Legal Issues When Modifying Equipment." Bud, a 35-year engineering veteran with the Toro Company, presented a realistic view of what may occur on the golf course when safety interlocks are not working properly. Many real examples were made apparent in a session about safety in the golf course environment. Bud, now a semi-retired legal witness for the Toro Company, appears for various court cases that pertain to safety interlocks and related issues in the safe operation of equipment. I wish to also acknowledge Ms. Carol Kelly, Corporate Product Integrity Specialist with the Toro Company, for customizing this presentation with Bud for our session. Many basic points were presented with graphic visuals of accidents that can happen and have happened.

As I stated before, technicians are responsible for the repair and replacement of safety switches. Most of this happens during the winter tear downs when every thing is out in the open for easy access. The vast wiring harnesses need to be inspected at the same time. After time, vibration, moisture, heat, or misrouting can cause wiring to fail. A simple inspection cover on the floor board of a rider can be reassembled without knowing that the battery cable is pinched. Such a situation could cause a melt-down that would lead to a fire and destruction of not only the equipment, but also whatever else is around it. In this case the picture up on the big screen spoke volumes. We did learn that in a severe case such as this, or in any bodily harm that may occur, the manufacturer will send someone out to the location of the accident and inspect the component, equipment, or surroundings that may have caused it. Bud's

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emphasized that keeping the machine and the scene in its original state are vital to finding out the cause.

Modification of original designs in safety systems, including shields, debris guards, and ROP (roll over protection), are never to be done without considering the consequences if an accident occurs. We may feel good about welding a frame back together on a utility vehicle that cracked from hitting a tree. We are all about saving the company money. It makes us look good and feel good to take on a task such as that. If that same vehicle hits another tree and the frame fails again, even if not at the same location on the frame, the manufacturer, the owner (golf course), and the person that did the repair could be held responsible for bodily injury. Although somewhat extreme, this example is possible. If wiring is re-routed to resolve some chronic repair issue, and it involves the interlock system, document everything in your records. Take pictures before and after repair. Even call the equipment manufacturer and describe what you have in mind. Maybe they have an update design to tell you about. This will better protect the owner and the service personnel responsible for the repair.

Take the time to watch the operators out there in action. Let it be known to the Superintendent or supervisor when you do this. This should be ongoing throughout the season. Repetitive actions will cause lax safety practices. For example suggest shutting off the machine when parked on an incline. Emphasize to the operator that it is OK to do this. The parking brake should not be entirely trusted. Think about a machine left running while sitting on a very wet bank as the operator walks out on the green to repair ball marks. Just the vibration of the running engine could cause the machine to start sliding down into what lies below. Remember, the parking brake was set and the wheels were locked.

Here are just a few more ideas to remember throughout the season. Record any safety switch replacements as they occur. When repairs are made, make them to the manufacturer's original specifications. Keep safety inventories of all equipment using the

check-off lists in the operator's manuals. Stress safety checks with operators on all equipment and around the shop area. Thanks once again to Bud for making the trip to Anaheim, and spending the time with us.

Back to the GIS and the trade show. Every year one tries different strategic plans of attack to cover the show floor. Fortunately this year I was in the presence of five other TETA members. Through the convenience of the cell phone we were able to cover a lot of ground together and apart. Weeks before the trip, back at the shop, Mike Matchen, General Manager Golf Operations/Superintendent, and Rick Becker, Assistant Superintendent, and I made up an agenda of what we wished to get out of the trip. With the many educational opportunities, speakers, and various topics of interest, there was very little time to get together on the show floor. We had some new equipment to look at for purchase this year at our golf course. The most time consuming pieces for us to look at were the deep-tine aerifiers. Four major manufacturers were there at the show. This truly is the way to shop. The factory engineers and service representatives, and even our own sales representatives, were on hand to discuss what our needs are, and what their equipment will, or will not, do.

Although it was not until late on the second day of the show that we all finally met up, it paid off.

We had three different perspectives and outcomes as to what we learned. Once the three of us were able to meet and revisit each product we still came away with different impressions of what the equipment will do for us at our unique course. This proves once again there is no one machine that fits the needs of all. The luxury of having key personnel at the show is truly a must. To be able to cover more ground and see every manufacturer when making the large purchase pays the golf course back for the cost of sending key personnel, including the equipment technician, to the GIS.

In upcoming issues I want to discuss the latest technologies in alternative fuels and electronics that are replacing hydraulic drive systems. Some products are already out there in the field such as natural gas and propane powered engines. Hydrogen cell power is here. More advances in battery power are happening all the time. We have cut gasoline usage by half, by replacing a gas fleet with an electric-powered fleet of golf carts. So far they have proven to be lower in cost and in maintenance.



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