



Using the same brand of power equipment can end up saving money by reusing parts from old machines to extend the life of a newer one.

MAKING THE GRADE

There are more factors than cost when deciding between commercial- or consumer-grade handheld equipment.

by Andy Klein

Commercial-grade or consumer-grade?

This is the most basic choice when deciding to purchase handheld power equipment for golf course maintenance. As every maintenance property is different, it is important to first evaluate which type of equipment will better fit your operation to determine the best buy.

At Kansas City Country Club, spending the extra money upfront to buy commercial-grade power equipment is the best choice since we are a park-style golf course that has approximately 2,500 trees on the property. As a result, a large amount of time is spent on leaf clean up, trimming and maintenance of our tree inventory. Having a reliable and durable fleet of handheld power equipment is vital to completing the day-to-day maintenance at our club.

Our fleet of power equipment consists of approximately 10 backpack blowers, 10 string trimmers and seven chainsaws. We try to stay consistent with the same brand. Generally speaking, we try to get three to five years of use out of each piece of equipment and replacement is determined by when the repair cost exceeds 40 percent of the equipment cost.

A big key is to have a fixed budget line to replace equipment to ensure reliability of the fleet of power equipment.

A qualified mechanic on staff at your course is essential when dealing with the preventative maintenance that is involved with keeping commercial grade power equipment working as long as possible. Our mechanic has been in the mechanics industry for more than 30 years; he prefers commercial grade equipment because in general, it just lasts longer than residential-grade equipment. Commercial-grade equipment is built specifically for everyday use where residential is designed for use one to two times per week.

Another plus with commercial equipment is that it often has more serviceable parts and replacement parts can usually be easily obtained through local licensed service dealers. These dealers generally require certified mechanics be on staff to help out with any issues with the brands they carry. Residential grade equipment is often constructed with a lot of molded parts and can be much harder if not impossible to service.

Preventative maintenance for a mechanic is also easier when dealing with commercial grade equipment. The main repairs are usu-



ally in two groups, mechanical and operator use. The mechanical portion includes filters, spark plugs and other expendables that will usually last a season with an occasional light cleaning. Blades, bars and chains need to be checked periodically depending on use and replaced when necessary. The second group of maintenance is dependent on the operator. It becomes a struggle to keep equipment running properly if you have an operator who is abusive to and who does not take proper care of the equipment. Examples include a broken throttle cable or deteriorated fuel line, this type of breakdown happens maybe a couple times a year on a 1- to 2-year-old piece of equipment. Costs can be minimized by performing quick inspections during the busy season and more detailed inspections in the off season which will give you a more intense look into your equipment.

When the equipment is no longer economical to use we try and reclaim parts that can be used on our other pieces of equipment. If this cannot be done then the item is recycled or discarded. When your fleet is of the same brand it can be of benefit to save some used parts off of an old machine and also gives the facility the ability to use up parts inventory on the remaining equipment that is still in use. This is another way to keep expenses to a minimum on your inventory. **GCI**

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Commercial-grade equipment is built to be used daily, while residential equipment is designed to be used a few times a week.

Keys to handheld equipment

Evaluate what equipment best fits the requirements of your course.

Will a qualified mechanic be on hand to maintain the equipment? Are parts readily available? If no to either of these questions, then perhaps a one-season, "disposable" unit is more appropriate.

Replace a unit when the repair cost exceeds 40 percent of the equipment cost.

Before disposing a worn out unit, evaluate any parts that can be recycled for future use.



by Brian DeVries

Tracking tools

Assistant superintendent Brian DeVries shares a sure-fire way to account for who has done what with which tools.

We've all experienced the end-of-year inventory of our hand tools and asked ourselves the question "Where did they go?" A season in this industry almost seems insurmountable from the perspective of an oft-used hand tool. To help ease the pain and take out some of the perplexity involved with the end of the year order, I am thankful to have been exposed to a hand tool check-out system. When I was an assistant at TPC Summerlin in Las Vegas, one of my responsibilities was to ensure the upkeep and inventory of our hand tools through a simple check-out routine. I know many golf courses around the country use a similar practice for hand tools and other equipment around their facilities, but I want to account my experiences with this type of approach and highlight the benefits of its use.

How does it work?

First, you need to locate an area in your shop where hand tools are easily accessible and hold known locations, i.e. hand saws go on this rack, hammers go on that rack.

Make sure the locations of where tools go are also clearly labeled, maybe even add Spanish to these labels for any Hispanic workers on staff. We even used pictures for some of our larger tools. Next, devise a list of employees and assign them a number. These numbers correlate to tabs with that same number on it that the employee will use when he checks out a hand tool. For larger items like a shovel, rake, or chainsaw, have a check-out sheet, where the employee can sign out and sign in



DeVries

a particular tool. Now the hard part: ensuring that everyone is playing by the rules. When you send the crew out in the morning, make sure you or a key member of the staff is around to see that tabs are used to replace the hand tools, and check out sheets are being used for larger tools. Bottom line, make sure the crew understands the importance of the system, why you use it.

What are the benefits you ask? Well, it's a great way to track the use of hand tools. If the hammer is missing, but the number 13 tag is hanging in its place, we know who to has it. Additionally, if the chainsaw comes back and it's dirty, we can use the check out sheet as a log to look back at the users. Also, it could help keep inventory at satisfactory levels. When the crew knows where a tool came from and where it goes, it is much easier to maintain inventory and keep the shop organized. More importantly, the system as a whole gives the crew some sense of ownership and the need to take more care in the tools they use, for when they check out a tool, their name is attached to that tool, and it becomes their responsibility.

In my experience, I feel this type of system is fairly easy to maintain. The benefits of the numbered tabs speak for themselves and the check out sheet gives you a very useful log for some of the more expensive hand tools. I wanted to share this management tip to illustrate an effective way to help keep inventories at a suitable level. I hope other courses can see the benefits of the use of a check-out system. On a personal note, I have used this technique with great results in a practical setting. In short, it certainly has my stamp of approval, and is a method I will employ as I go forward in my career. **GCI**

Brian DeVries is assistant superintendent at Cascade Hills Country Club in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is a frequent GCI contributor.



To use a tool check-out system, start by keeping hand tools all in one place where missing tools can be noticed at a glance.