

## Stable Environment

Slow-release fertilizer helps maintain healthy turf on a high-traffic course

BY MICHAEL KARDELIS

**M**aintaining a top-notch golf course while being kind to the environment is tough enough. When you throw in high traffic, it's enough to give a superintendent a migraine.

Memorial Park GC in Houston handles 70,000 rounds per year, almost double the national average for 18-hole municipal courses. Superintendent Jason Harsh had to devise a creative fertilizer strategy to handle the volume of golfers, remain environmentally friendly

### Problem

A high volume of golfers, combined with a commitment to environmental sensitivity, makes creating an adequate fertilizer schedule difficult.

### Solution

Stabilized nitrogen fertilizers provide a source of nitrogen that can be applied year-round once a week to provide the turf with proper nutrition despite being overrun with golfers nearly every day.



Fertilization creativity is a must for a course that handles 200 to 300 rounds per day, as Memorial Park CC in Houston does.

and provide his turf with proper nutrition.

"Providing an enjoyable and environmentally friendly course is sometimes difficult with a course that handles this many rounds of golf," Harsh says. "But it can be done."

### The problem

Harsh served as assistant superintendent at Memorial Park for one year before taking over as superintendent in June 1997. The grounds crew had been struggling with growing and maintaining turf amid almost constant play. "Few people have



been exposed to the problem of accomplishing any maintenance on a golf course that sees 250 to 300 rounds each day," Harsh says.

Heavy tournament schedules and adverse weather tacked on additional complications. Harsh faced a challenge to create a fertilization program that would meet the

**Memorial Park superintendent Jason Harsh says it's a plus that stabilized nitrogen doesn't depend on soil microbes to break it down.**

nutritional needs of the turf while working around the golfers.

"It's a big challenge to produce quality turf," Harsh says. "As most super-



intendents know, we have only a limited time to fertilize.”

With so many pressures on the turf program, Memorial Park needed immediate attention.

### The solution

Targeting year-round color and constant growth as top priorities, Harsh looked for a fertilizer with a stabilized-nitrogen base.

Stabilized-nitrogen products improve nitrogen efficiency by means of a urease inhibitor and a nitrification inhibitor. The inhibitors modify soil chemistry to extend nitrogen availability. Although stabilized-nitrogen products provide all the benefits of slow-release fertilizers, manufacturing economies make them less expensive than organic, coated and complex-chain products, according to Al Nees, vice president of turf and ornamental sales for Agrotain International, a company that manufactures stabilized-nitrogen products. Since they function like slow-release products, superintendents can make fewer applications year-round.

To meet his needs, Harsh chose UMAXX, an Agrotain product that combines N (n-Butyl) thiophosphoric triamide (NBPT) and dicyandiamide (DCD), which are both inhibitors. NBPT is a urease inhibitor that stops nitrogen volatilization, while DCD keeps the nitrogen in its ammoniacal form longer, which plants absorb more easily. DCD also keeps the nitrogen in the soil longer and prevents leaching and denitrification.

The product doesn't rely on outside agents like water or heat to release its nutrients. Instead, it works in tandem with nature to keep nitrogen in a usable form longer in the root zone. As a result, Harsh can apply less fertilizer.

Harsh uses both granular and liquid applications of stabilized nitrogen to fertilize his course. Because so many rounds are played at Memorial

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With lakes on the course, Memorial Park has to pay close attention to the environmental impact of its fertilizer.

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"Maintaining dense, uniform grass is our No. 1 goal, but I try not to stop there," says Bart Miller. "The 'elite turf' appearance I strive for requires a darker green, vibrant turf color," Bart adds, "and applying Ferromec<sup>®</sup> AC Liquid Iron is the easiest, surest and safest way I know of for getting it."

Another thing the Whiskey Creek superintendent likes about fine-tuning his turf color with Ferromec AC: This liquid iron promotes no significant topgrowth. "It avoids problems like you see when plants are all pumped up from too much N," Bart explains.

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5-2002/10465

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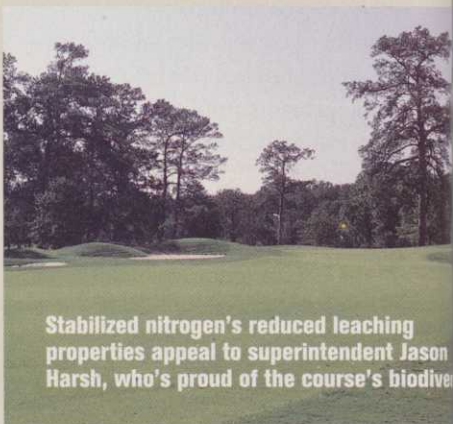
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Park each day, he has only one day per week to complete the entire process.

"I can put down a stabilized-nitrogen fertilizer anytime of the year, and it doesn't need to be watered in right away. It isn't dependent on soil microbes to break it down. That's a plus."

As committed as he is to meeting the challenges of healthy turf, Harsh believes passionately in environmental friendliness. He is an active member of the Audubon Signature Program, which promotes wildlife conservation and habitat enhancement. He's proud of the biodiversity on his course, so the reduced leaching properties of stabilized nitrogen also appeal to him.

"Our course provides a place for wildlife to live and players to enjoy rounds of golf, while still being environmentally friendly," Harsh said. "The consistency of the products that I use



Stabilized nitrogen's reduced leaching properties appeal to superintendent Jason Harsh, who's proud of the course's biodi-

and involvement from management help keep my course in the best environmental condition possible."

Harsh is proud of the professional appearance at his course, and he believes stabilized nitrogen helps create it. Continuing to uphold the top-notch look of the course with environmentally oriented practices will always be a top priority. ■

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