

THANKS TO TRIED AND TRUE FRIENDS

By Bill Roberts

I answered the telephone one day not too long ago and was on the receiving end of a diatribe which I had hoped would have "breathed it's last" in our profession, but, apparently, not so. The conversation, for lack of better term, went something like this. . .

BR: "SentryWorld. . . Bill Roberts"

Caller: "Mr. William Roberts please"

BR: "Yes, speaking"

Caller: "Mr. William R. Roberts of the SentryWorld Golf Course?"

BR: "That's right, speaking"

Caller: "Mr. Roberts?"

BR: "Yes. . . That's right. . . This is Bill Roberts" (and am I irritated by now or what?)

Caller: "Mr. Roberts, this is Jim Smith from XYZ Supply and from our company to your home we would like to send you and your lovely wife a Presto Coffeemaker for your home" (first of all I have a hard time believing anybody really talks like that and beyond that how does this guy even know I'm married or that I want a coffeemaker since I don't drink the stuff anyway).

"But first, Mr. Roberts, are you interested in solving all your problems with your broadleaf weeds forever?"

(now when did they get to be my weeds?) "Or are you more more interested in a total vegetation kill for your golf course, cemetery, hospital grounds, parks or all of the above? (These guys are great aren't they?)

BR: "Well, my mom didn't raise any fool. . . why don't I become interested in broadleaf weeds forever"?

Caller: "Terrific. . . Now for your initial order of 55 gallons, shipped directly to you at only \$69.00 per gallon you will be rid of your broadleaf weeds forever." (they are still my weeds)

BR: "Well, terrific to you too, but before we do that can you tell me the active ingredient and the percent active ingredient and the cost per thousand?"

Caller: "-----"

BR: "Hello? Did you hear my questions?"

Caller: Well we can ship it in a 30 gallon drum also."

BR: "No, first, did you hear my questions?"

Caller: "Click"

Mine was not, of course, a unique experience but it is one that I find frustrating, particularly when viewed in light of the people who honestly and fairly play such an important role in our industry; our local turf product distributors. We are indeed fortunate in Wisconsin to be served by and to serve with a group who, I believe, are genuinely interested in, not only making a buck (and there is nothing wrong with that) but also in seeing Golf Course Superintendents succeed.

I know I may offend someone through an error of omission and I apologize in advance but I would like to name a few of the individuals who have helped all of us through some tight spots in times gone by. People like Ed Devinger, John Mortimer, Joe Wollner, Dick Evenson, Neil Richter, Ralph Christopherson and Curt Larson and their associates help make it

possible for us to perform.

Our distributors and sales representatives and service technicians introduce us to new products and listen, patiently, to our opinions on the old. They take our orders and process them and deliver needed materials on time. They spend hours setting up demonstrations. They share the information picked up as they travel the state or gleaned as they attend their own product information meetings. They sponsor "turf clinics" and shows. They keep current on the latest management trends. They listen to constructive criticism and, let's face it, on occasion they put up with some pretty unreasonable demands. And they always come through in the end.

Further, we in Wisconsin are, again, fortunate to serve with a pretty progressive group of individuals in that segment of our industry. We have seen them support, both financially and professionally, the efforts of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association, the WGCSA "THE GRASS ROOTS" (without their support this publication does not exist as we've come to know it) and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association and those organizations' related activities. And they lend that support without expecting a whole lot of conversation about it.

I suspect, however, that they would appreciate a mention and a "thank-you" once in awhile. I just gave them one. You can do the same by saying thanks and supporting them. After all, that's what they have been doing for you.

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THE MENACE FROM BENEATH

By Monroe S. Miller

It's a fairly common human instinct to fear the new more than the familiar. But a recent study by the Environmental Protection Agency that I read about indicates that ignoring the dangers of familiar and quite simple technology could be lethal. It is a technical problem that likely affects most of us managing a golf course. The threat discussed in this EPA report is the one that our underground fuel tanks pose to groundwater.

It isn't news that I think Golf Course Superintendents are among the most responsible environmentalists in our country, and since we do often store fuel underground, it is imperative that we cooperate fully with proposed programs to stem this threat. In a random sampling of 433 of the country's 800,000 underground storage tanks that hold gasoline and diesel fuel, the EPA found that as many as 35% of the

tanks leak. This is a far higher percentage than has ever been predicted by the fuel industry analysts. We all know that fuels contain some toxic chemicals (some are carcinogenic) and the danger to public health could be catastrophic. In fact, with about half of the U.S. relying on groundwater, the harm could potentially be greater than that caused by toxic waste dumps, according to some experts.

Compounding the problem is the fact that recent innovations to reduce the leakage are not working as originally believed. Inspired by concern about groundwater pollution, Congress passed legislation in 1984 that required new tanks be constructed from fiberglass or some other non-corrosive material to prevent the kind of leakage that occurs in steel tanks. About 90% of the underground fuel tanks in America are currently made of steel.

Well, it turns out that fiberglass tanks leak at the same rate as steel ones.

Our country's dependence on groundwater is too great for a wait and see attitude. Fast action is required. Any program ought to include research to find those materials suitable for the construction and coating of underground tanks. I cannot believe that this is an insurmountable problem for engineers. Secondly, more use of technology currently available is important; cathodic protection is one example of a process seldom used to my knowledge.

Finally, tanks now in use need to be located and tested for leakage so that an assessment can be made of the threat they pose to groundwater. Those that are hazardous need to be drained and taken out of service. The State of Wisconsin's Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations has been assigned the responsibility of inventorying underground petroleum tanks. If your golf course stores fuel underground, please get a form from your fuel supplier or from DILHR and fill it out.

Remember, groundwater is worth protecting. The solutions will be expensive. But surely this is a problem better paid for now than later.

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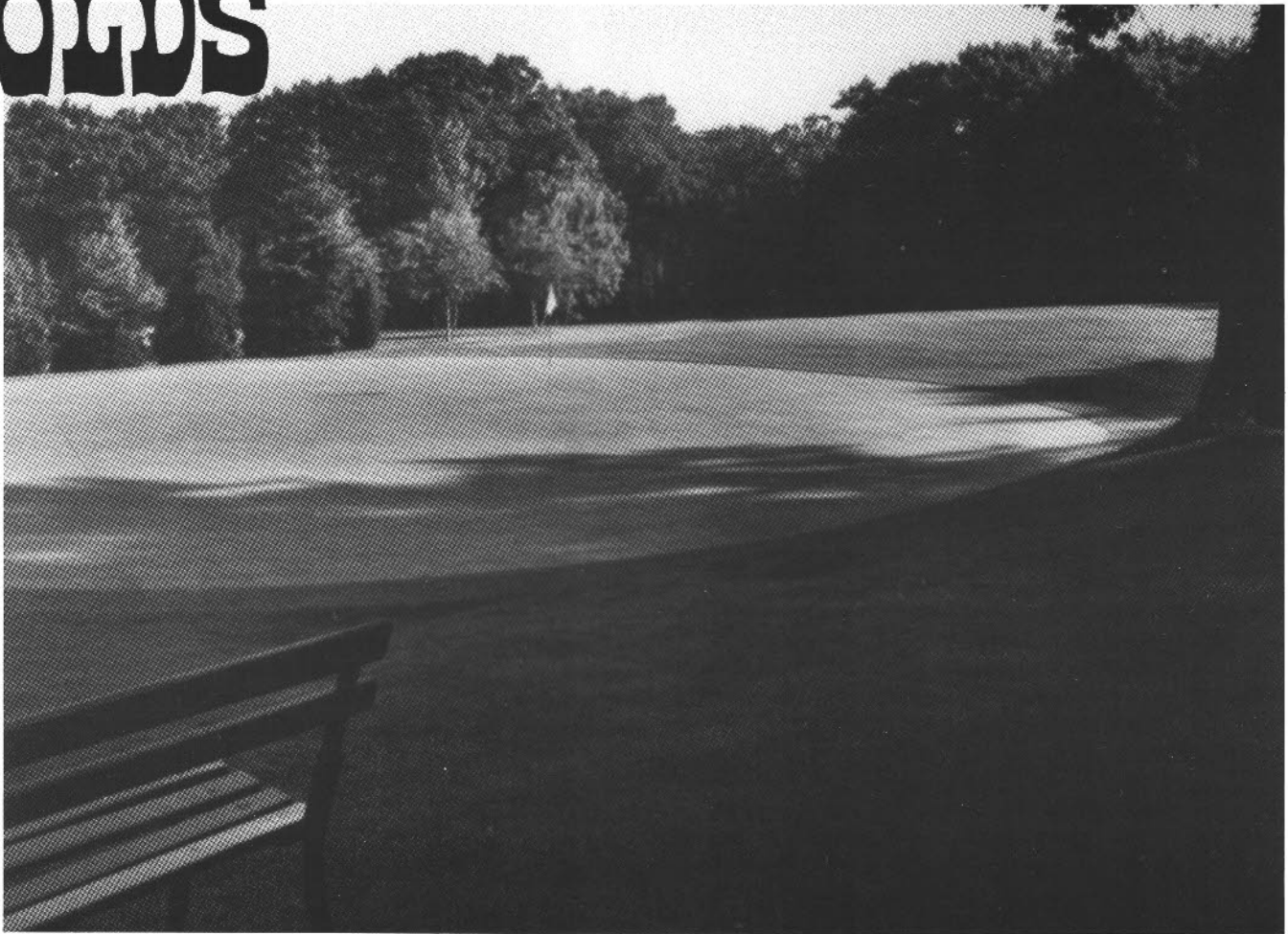
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CATASTROPHES

By Monroe S. Miller

There are a couple of things you have to remember if you are in this business of managing a golf course. One is that almost everything takes a lot of time - more time than you or your players think it should. Nature seems to take care of that. Newly planted trees seem to be small forever. It takes years before you begin to notice them. You cannot topdress greens today and expect them to roll fast and perfect tomorrow. Maybe in a week or even ten days, but not tomorrow. You have to wait, after sowing bentgrass seed in an area, for the seeds to imbibe water, germinate, establish a root system and foliage, before you can even mow for the first time. Wait some more for the area to fill in enough to tolerate the more frequent mowing and traffic. New construction takes time to settle to final grade. Fresh sand in bunkers will precipitate grumbling from players for months and months until it finally firms up. Wait . . . wait . . . wait, for the rains to come. Wait some more for them to stop. It never ends, and you learn early on that a Golf Course Superintendent must have an abundance of patience if he is to survive, prosper and enjoy this business.

The other thing you must recognize and accept is that there is always, and I do mean ALWAYS, something wrong or something broken. We are too often reacting to situations, because of this uncomfortable and undeniable fact. No amount of planning or caution or griping can overcome this. It is the nature of the beast, I guess. I've observed in the past 20 years that never has a season gone by that we don't have to deal with catastrophes. And you must be prepared to suffer catastrophes without losing your courage or your composure.

It is strange, almost perverse, that I remember so many of these catastrophes - the worst of my experiences on a golf course. They've caused so much misery and work and worry that one would think, on the surface, that you'd put them out of your mind. Less wierd, maybe, is the fact that I can recall with clarity stories of

catastrophes that happened at Blackhawk Country Club before I arrived and catastrophes other Golf Course Managers have experienced. I guess there is some truth in the old saw that "misery likes company".

All of these things, thankfully, don't happen in one year. If they did, they would do us all in. When you lump many of these incidents together like I am here, or like you might do in a moment of reflection, they seem almost ludicrous. How in the world could some of them ever happen? Well they did, they still do, and they probably always will.

There was the time, for example, when the old Toro Series IV tractor got away from the driver. Although it happened before my time here, I've heard the story many times, from older employees and from members who were witnesses. Seems it was parked above the 18th tee, running, without the parking brake set. Well, the worst happened - across 18 tee, down the 100% slope, over 17 green and down that steep bank just missing several big oak trees. End of story? Sorry not. Off the golf course, across both lanes of Lake Mendota Drive, barely missing an oncoming car, through a neighbor's yard and . . . CRASH! Right into his living room. Lots of damage to the house and a lot of embarrassment. The good news was that no one was hurt and that the old Toro suffered little damage and is still, to this day, in great working order. I wonder how many other catastrophes that old tractor could tell about.

You'd think one trip into a house would be enough for any golf course, wouldn't you? Well, not here. The other time it happened was way on the west end of the golf course. Same story, only different vehicle, different house (thank God!) and different actor. Fortunately I wasn't here for that one, either.

It isn't that I haven't witnessed my share of accidents in the past 15 years. Far from it. I preach, instruct and demand safety, yet I've experienced the gut-wrenching sight of three different Greenskings lying on their side, rolled

off and over the steep banks of this hilly golf course. I've pulled a Toyota pickup away from the trunk of a 70' American Linden tree, knowing it was a total loss (small loss, at least. I hate Japanese trucks.) On two occasions I've been awakened at night by the phone call of a night waterman, shaken and scared because a Cushman truckster had gotten away from him and found a tree to pile into. One we were able to repair; the other challenged an insurance adjuster who finally declared it "totalled".

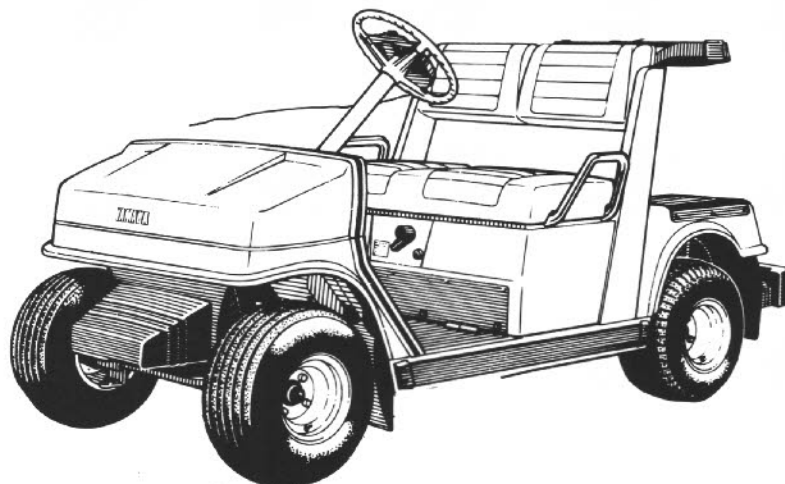
The dramatic yet severe grade changes make Blackhawk a beautiful golf course, but the price of this beauty has been very high. I shudder to think of what is next, knowing full well that there will be a next time. When will it come? But I have never had an experience like Bill Eckert had in 1973. Bill was Tom Harrison's predecessor at Maple Bluff and I will never forget his panic call on an early summer morning nearly 15 years ago. They were spraying greens that day and in addition to the fungicide they were putting down, Bill was adding one ounce of FeSO_4/M . He left a list of materials and their quantities for the applicator who had come in early to get ahead of play. Bill had clearly written "add 4# FeSO_4 to the tank". Well, his employee was apparently still riding the snooze bus through Sleepy Hollow when he was getting ready to go and misread the "4 pounds FeSO_4 ". He added 40 pounds! It wasn't until he was back in the shop for a refill that he asked Bill, "Why are we adding so much ferrous sulfate this week?" Eckert was dumbfounded. "We aren't," he replied. "Sure we are," was the comeback. "Look at your recipe - it does say '40 pounds FeSO_4 ', doesn't it?" Bill hadn't misprinted - the employee had misread. I shot over there as quickly as I could. Eckert was chain smoking and Harrison was wild. They finally decided to quickly mow the sprayed greens, hoping most of the FeSO_4 was on the foliage. They then watered heavily, despite the fact it was a Women's Day. Those greens were as black as coal for a few days, but turned into a vibrant and rich green after that. Bill left the business not many years later. Harrison's hair immediately turned gray.

I still shudder at the close call we had the spring we built our new pump-house. The contractor started in February and made excellent progress,

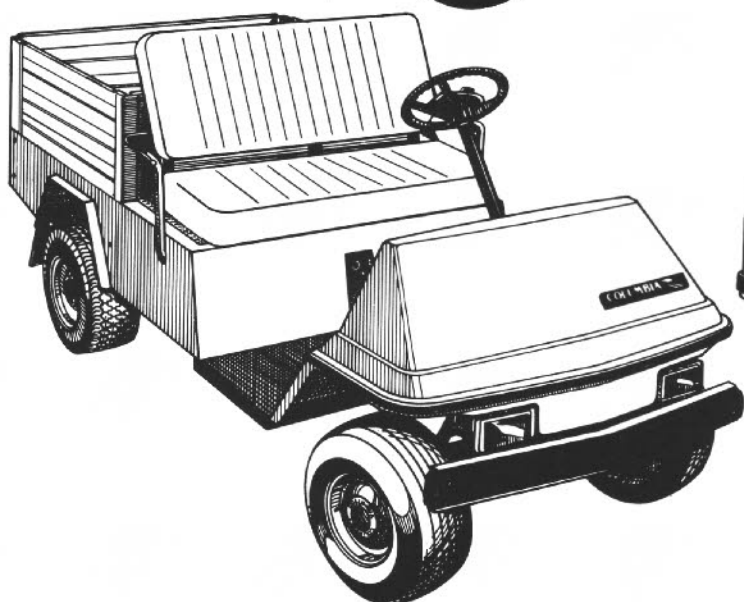
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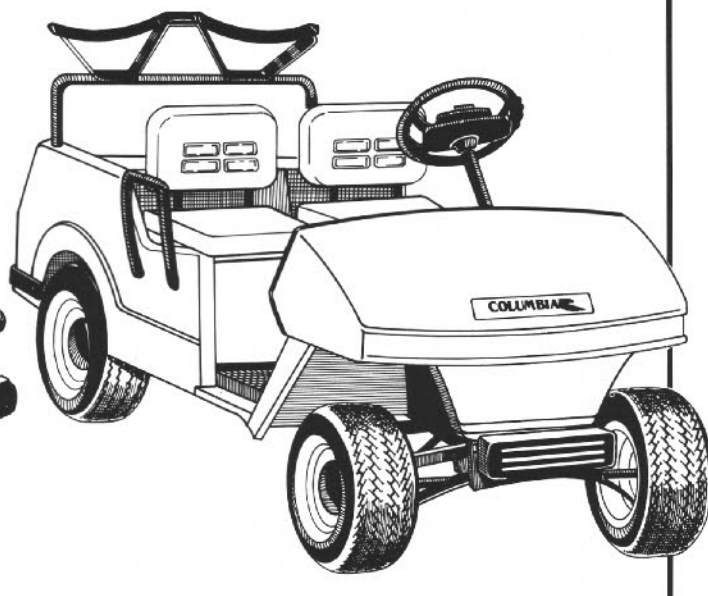
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(Continued from page 5.)

such good progress that we were actually ahead of schedule. But it wasn't a normal spring, not even close. We opened early. It was very dry. It didn't rain. Panic set in. Players were screaming that the greens were like airport runways. We were barely able to cut cups. Grass was wilting everywhere, despite the fact it was only early April. We wondered what in the hell we were going to have to do. Well, we did the obvious. We were forced to get permission from the Village Fire Chief to use a fire hydrant for a water source to fill our own sprayer and those borrowed from Nakoma and Maple Bluff. We set up 3/4" hose and RainBird 707 sprinklers on roller bases and started watering greens. We hauled water for a week, first doing greens, then tees, then greens again, then the distressed fairway areas. It finally did rain, just about the day we were ready to start pumping water.

As if that wasn't bad enough to insure a similar catastrophe would never happen to me again, it certainly did - a year ago this past spring. This time we were installing a new 12" irrigation main from our new pumphouse (it will always be the "new" pumphouse), across the 16th hole, under Lake Mendota Drive to the pipeline that moves water to the other 17 holes. Again, we started early - the contractor had to plow off nearly 5 feet of snow before he could start digging. Progress was

excellent. But 1986 was another early season with no spring rains. The contractor was happy because things were going well and he was suffering no interruptions due to the weather. I, on the other hand, was frantic. Back to the Fire Chief to borrow a hydrant wrench. We hauled water for days, sweat bullets and prayed for rain. It finally did come, but not until we had suffered to an excess.

Disease infections, irrigation system breaks, hydraulic oil leaks, hot weather, cold weather, employees and a thousand other things that are sometimes out of our control turn our profession into one big gamble. "It makes you

wonder why anyone would want to do this for a career," I once remarked to Pat Zurawski, my Assistant, after a particularly trying catastrophe.

"Damned if I know," Pat said. And despite his youth and all of the exuberance that it brings, he really *didn't* know. He was having difficulty understanding what compelled so many of us to love managing a golf course. It can be so unpredictable, too often unrewarding and, often as not, very frustrating.

"I guess it just gets in your blood," he concluded.

Pat was right.

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THE NOER CENTER— WE NEED IT TOO!

By Jim Rodgers
Lohmann Golf Designs

The profession of golf course architecture requires one to be very knowledgeable and well-informed in many areas. Knowledge is needed in landscape architecture, site planning, surveying, engineering of all forms, construction methods, design principles, irrigation, electricity, soils, agronomy, and maintenance practices. With this kind of extensive background necessary, it becomes impossible to be an expert in every area. For this reason, we often consult experts in specific fields. One of these fields is in the area of turfgrass research, encompassing soils, soil mixes, turf, and maintenance. The development of a turfgrass research center in Madison would be a great resource to golf course designers in the area.

Putting greens are the most important single feature on a golf course and are therefore the most closely scrutin-

ized portion of golf course construction. If the green is to remain playable and easily maintainable, it is imperative that it be constructed with the most up-to-date information available. Developments such as the perched water table effect have had positive and lasting effects on the surface we putt on. It is not enough to have a sand, peat, and gravel that appear to be a good base for a green. We need to have these materials tested to insure they are good and that we use them in the right combination. Even with this high level of analysis, problems such as black layer may arise. Therefore, we must not just stay with one standard of construction, but rather continue to pursue developing newer and better materials. In addition to putting green mixes, a turfgrass research center aids the designer in analysis of soils and bunker sands. The more thoroughly we study

the different materials we use on our golf courses, the greater the long run benefits will be.

Another advantage of turfgrass research comes in the areas of playability and maintainability. By developing stronger and more resistant cultivars, we will have golf courses that are greener longer, more uniform, and more aesthetically pleasing which are therefore more enjoyable to play on. Also, if we continue to improve maintenance practices, our golf courses will continue to look better. Recent trends, such as lightweight mowing, contour mowing, and clipping removal have greatly improved the quality of our golf courses. Not only will our courses look better, they will be maintained more economically.

As strides continue to be made in turfgrass research, the lawn maintenance industry and homeowner reap benefits in addition to golf courses. More can be done better for less money.

In summary, the development of a turfgrass research facility will be of great benefit. Golf courses, office complex grounds, and home lawns will continue to look better for less money. And when that happens, everyone comes out a winner.



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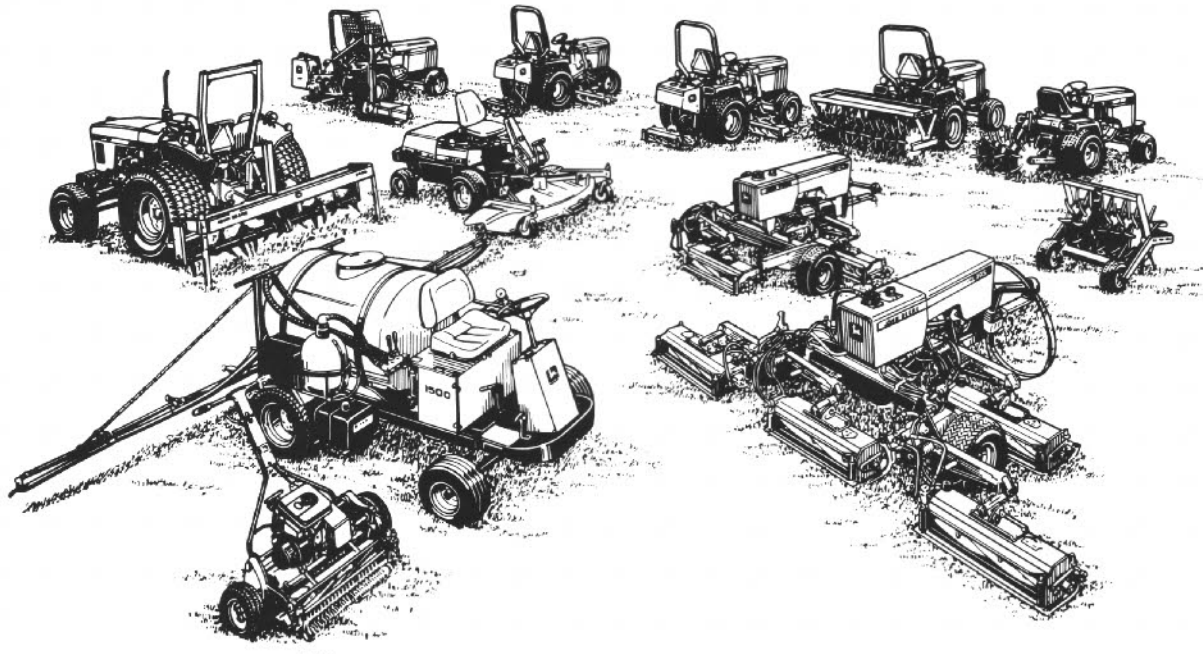


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