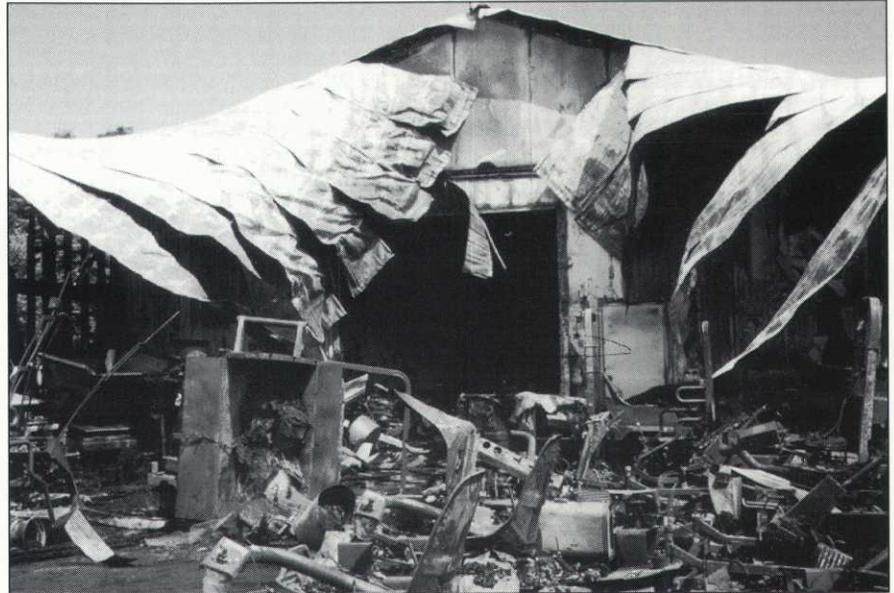


Fire Destroys Chaska Town Course Maintenance Building

By MARK MOERS
Superintendent, Chaska Town Course

On Wednesday, July 10th at 5:15 p.m., fire destroyed three quarters of our maintenance building along with all the maintenance equipment inside the building, causing an estimated 1.3 million dollars in damage. The one exception was a fairway mower that was off site being repaired. When the fire department arrived at 5:19 p.m., they found a large amount of smoke. While sizing up the fire, they discovered one third of the roof had already collapsed. There was also a concern that the fire had involved our chemical storage building sixty feet away, however, it was determined there was no fire in the building and damage was caused from radiant heat from the maintenance building fire (see photo on Page 16). The fire did not spread into our offices and employee areas due to the 1-hour firewall that was between the offices and shop area, although there was some water and smoke damage. Therefore, all our records, irrigation computer, and personal belongings were spared.

The only cause of the fire that could not be ruled out was a malfunction inside the engine compartment of a 1989 Chevy S-10 pickup, which was the last thing to be parked in



EQUIPMENT STORAGE BUILDING

the equipment storage area that day. According to the fire investigator's report, when the Chevy S-10 started to burn, the fire approached the garage door opener that was located almost directly over the pickup and shorted out the garage door opener. Once that happened the garage door opened, thus fueling more oxygen into the fire and accelerating the burning. When the engine compartment was fully involved it radiated heat to the other pieces of equipment and they eventually ignited. One issue that contributed to the extensive damage was the failure of the roll down fire door between the shop area and the equipment parking area. In examining the fire door, it was found that the fusible links had not been placed on both sides of the firewall. Because the fusible links were on the shop side of the wall



BURIED EQUIPMENT AFTER THE FIRE

(Continued on Page 16)

Chaska Town Course Fire—

(Continued from Page 15)

where the door was mounted, the fire damaged the door prior to releasing the fusible links.

Early the next morning, a meeting took place between the city administrator, the city's insurance coordinator, the city engineer and myself. At this time we received confirmation from the city's insurance provider that everything damaged or destroyed was covered at replacement cost. We also decided we needed a temporary office because the offices could not be occupied, due to the smoke and water damage. Some sort of covered enclosure for equipment storage, and some type of building to perform routine equipment maintenance. We rented a construction trailer to house our offices and employee break room, a 40' by 60' tent structure for equipment storage and we also were given the go ahead by the insurance company to construct a 24' by 28' garage for repair work. Because the tent company couldn't come for more than a week, the Chaska Public Works Dept. installed a chain link fence compound in our parking lot to secure the equipment. The next step was finding equipment to use until new equipment could be purchased. With help from Hazeltine, Chaska's Park Dept., the Chaska Par 30, MTI Distributing, Inc., Minnesota Golf Cars and offers from many area golf courses and distributors we were able to obtain enough equipment to get us through the next couple

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of days.

At the July council meeting, the council declared the fire an emergency situation which gives the City the option of not bidding the construction out. This will speed up the building process with the exception of being done rebuilding by mid-October. The building will be the same as the original one, only the rebuilt one will have fire protection installed. There was some debate on the office portion of the building, such as should it come down and start over or



THE CHEMICAL BUILDING AT THE CHASKA TOWN COURSE was spared of any interior damage but the radiant heat from the maintenance building fire caused some exterior damage.

restore it. The insurance company decided that it should be restored, so that is what is taking place now. Demolition of the burned out building started on July 22nd and was completed July 31st. The equipment repair garage was started July 15th and finished August 1st. We were in the temporary office trailer on July 16th, and as of August 10th, we had 95% of our new equipment on site.

Our goal after the fire was not to let the fire affect the condition of the golf course. With the patience and determination of the seasonal grounds staff and the passion and dedication of Steve Dellwo, Jim Holden, Dave Reif and Bill Teich we met and exceeded that goal. to them I say "it is an honor and pleasure to work with you." I also would like to say thanks to everyone that called and offered the use of equipment or your services – it is greatly appreciated.

Leaves—

(Continued from Page 14)

turfgrass plant. Also, turfgrass can take up to three times the legal load limit that agricultural fields can have applied. However, it is apparent that technology could improve (or devolve, in this case) to give the turfgrass manager a specialized machine for this annual chore.

It is also time that municipalities (and possibly homeowners) follow the lead of golf course superintendents and ground managers by mulching leaf litter into existing turfgrass sites with rotary-mowers. With a little education, literally millions of dollars could be saved annually in the United States.

(Editor's Note: Thomas A. Nikolai is the turfgrass academic specialist at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. This article was reprinted with permission from the October 1, 2001 issue of Grounds Maintenance magazine.)