

# How Do You Do...?

**The Question -- How Did You Handle Sports Turf Care Under Severe Drought Conditions/Watering Restrictions ?**

*Answered by George Van Haasteren, CGM; Dwight-Englewood School (NJ)*

Water restrictions were implemented the first week of August. Below average precipitation had occurred during the months of May and June. July proved to be the hottest and driest ever recorded in the state of New Jersey. The previous year was also a dry year.

Throughout the year, scheduled maintenance procedures were performed to keep the fields safe and playable. Once the restrictions were imposed, I worked within the parameters of those restrictions. At the time they were imposed, we were in the process of aerating, topdressing and overseeding the fields. We had the opportunity to irrigate between the hours of 12:00 A.M. - 6:00 A.M. The restrictions also allowed for watering for a certain amount of days if fields had been fertilized or if pesticides and/or herbicides were applied. All work was documented and logged.

I called upon other sports turf managers and athletic directors throughout the state to get their feedback and to urge them to contact the Water Emergency Task Force. The emphasis was on safety and liability issues. Some towns had already closed their fields.

I also personally wrote to the Task Force emphasizing the importance of maintaining irrigation practices on athletic fields in relationship to injuries on fields that could not be irrigated. Along with my letter, I sent a copy of Maryland's exemption of athletic fields from water restrictions. At the end of August, restrictions were lifted for athletic fields and we were able to water during set hours.

I believe that networking and working with fellow sports turf managers, and informing state officials of the effects of proper irrigation in relationship to field safety, had a strong impact on their decision to lift the restrictions on athletic fields. It is also important to implement a scheduled maintenance program to keep your fields in the best shape possible. This includes such things as proper fertilization, topdressing and using high quality seed. Proper irrigation practices along with daily monitoring of the fields are paramount in athletic field maintenance.

*Answered by Paul Zwaska, Baltimore (MD) Orioles*

Actually, being a major league field, we were granted a special exception from the Governor to water

the field itself as needed. This exception was eventually broadened to include high school and college fields due to the safety factor and the fall season due to start soon.

As far as the landscaping outside and around the actual field, we trucked in recycled water from the sewage treatment plant. We put up signs to notify the public of that fact - both as a public relations and a safety tool.

*Answered by Tim Moore, Maryland National Capital Parks & Planning Commission*

During the drought, I did whatever I could to keep traffic off the fields. All heavy machinery was kept off the fields, including riding mowers, and play was heavily discouraged.

For the irrigated fields, we were mandated to cut back our water usage by 50%. I kept the mowing height up (and in some instances increased frequency) and made sure we were cutting with razor sharp blades. By keeping the grass cut and doing it frequently, I was attempting to decrease my loss of

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water through transpiration through the leaves. A skinny short man sweats less than a tall fat man! (I also did a lot of rain dances!)

Answered by Dave Navarro, University of Maryland

Dealing with drought conditions and water restrictions is never an easy task. As a turfgrass manager for Campus Recreation Services (CRS) University of Maryland, College Park, it is important to anticipate the worst and be prepared for it. At the start of the spring semester we prepare our fields for daily use that begins in late spring and continues through the summer months. CRS tries to maintain desirable and safe-playing surfaces at all times through proper cultural practices such as weed control, aerification, fertilization, overseeding and mowing. These cultural practices in the spring enable the tall fescue mix athletic fields to survive a possibility of drought with a healthy well-rooted turf stand. By the middle of summer, activities on CRS athletic fields slow down. After the slow down, we limit foot traffic and unscheduled use on the

fields to avoid further wear spots and damage to the turf stand.

When water restrictions were implemented in the Maryland area, although voluntary at first, CRS did their part to try and help conserve water. We first cut back our watering to 50% of the normal time period. When watering did occur, it was a deep syringing with minimal runoff. This enabled the turf stand to maintain a good root system for what was soon to come. When mandatory water restrictions were implemented, Campus Recreation Services complied and shut down all watering to all fields. Soon after this was done, the drought tolerant tall fescue was starting to brown out and dormancy was setting in. We then cut back on all maintenance and cultural practices to minimize any further damage that might occur to the turf during this time of stress.

Now that the rains have come back and water restrictions have been lifted our fields our greening up. With proper cultural practices and preventative maintenance we can now look forward to a green fall.



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