

WATER WORKSHOP SUMMARY

WATER RESTRICTIONS HAVE BECOME THE NORM IN MANY CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES



Four key issues were presented at the workshop: 1) water use regulations and the rationale for water conservation; 2) the role of water in sports turf management; 3) effective irrigation; and 4) importance of good fields to the end user.

Water use restrictions have become the norm in many Canadian municipalities. Southern Ontario has a growing urban population that has a significant water demand. Peak water use demand occurs

during summer months and is attributable primarily to landscape irrigation although car washing and filling swimming pools also contribute to demand.

Climate change may lead to more regular periods of reduced water availability. Drought conditions both increase seasonal water taking and decrease surface water flow in streams and rivers which are used as the indicator to initiate water use restrictions through the Ontario Low Water Response mechanism. Municipal water systems also face the challenge of designing and maintaining systems that are capable of handling short term, peak seasonal water demands. Any disruption to the system, such as contamination and shutdown of well fields as has happened in Waterloo Region, further reduce system capacity to deliver water.

Water use is critical for maintaining

functional athletic turf. Dry, dormant turf does not have the recuperative potential, playability or cooling effect of actively growing turf. User groups clearly favour fields that are irrigated over non-irrigated fields. Most municipalities with field classification systems would typically rank their irrigated fields within the top level of classification. Turf managers are becoming more attuned to effective water management both through common sense use of the resource to optimize turf growth as well as through the use of current irrigation technology which provides a high degree of control over water application.

Where regulation and professional sports field management fail to meet is in the development of policy that takes into account effective field irrigation. There is a range of approaches to water restrictions but most are based on time and day of the



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week restrictions such as odd and even date watering corresponding to the municipal address of properties as well as limited time frames during the day when irrigation may be applied. These approaches are easy to communicate to homeowners and enforce, but they do not take into account the needs of sports fields which are significantly different from home lawns. A more effective approach for sports fields may be to budget water use to a level sufficient for growth but permit longer periods of application which may be needed depending upon the capability of the irrigation system to deliver the appropriate amount of water.

Where do we go from here? A show of hands at the conclusion of the workshop indicated that only two people in the room felt that they had an effective say in water use policy making. It is incumbent on professional sports field managers to both use water responsibly as well as actively communicate the importance of water in an environmentally sustainable turf management system. Golf courses have responded to water restrictions by increasing water storage capacity through pond construction as well as investigating alternative

water sources. Most new housing developments require the construction of storm water ponds which could perhaps be integrated with sports field areas to provide an alternative source of irrigation water. In addition to producing potable water, municipalities also treat a significant quantity of effluent water. Although it would require significant infrastructure investment, integrating sports fields into municipal water treatment systems is worthy of further investigation and research.

It is not easy finding a place on the crowded agenda of municipal councils. Development of sports field water use policy that serves field needs as well as municipal demands to reduce water use is a challenge for sports field managers. Utilizing best management practices, staying current with regards to technology and cultural management techniques, investigating alternative water sources as well as communicating effectively with user groups and policy makers are all key in developing a water conservation strategy that will promote safe and functional sports fields. ♦

~ Rob Witherspoon, Director, Guelph Turfgrass Institute



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