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"Readying Your System for Winter"

By Luke Frank

Reprinted from the October 1999 issue of Landscape & Irrigation

The days are getting shorter and the nights cooler. Leaves are flaming their oranges, reds and yellows, and landscapes are preparing for hibernation. As Old Man winter approaches, so should your winterization plans.

Winterization is a fact of life in some areas more than others, and, although it's not overly complicated proper winterization needs to be performed to avoid pipe and system damage that may surface next spring or later.

Water in your system can be your worst enemy in the winter. Some contractors believe poly pipe offers sufficient flexibility to absorb the expanding and contracting forces of water in the winter. However, most experts agree that all piping needs to be thoroughly blown out. Even if the poly pipe holds through the next irrigation season, the freezing and thawing of water left in the system over the winter can stress the piping and easily result in failure down the road.

A combination of strategically placed drains in the system's low spots and a good, properly selected air compressor will make relatively quick work of residential or commercial system winterization. However, speed is not the issue here—thoroughness is.

Opinions vary on just how much pressure and volume of air are required to properly blow out a system. But high pressures (60 psi and greater) should be avoided. Air volume—not pressure—is the critical component to evacuating a piping system of water.

Air volume and pressure should be based on the specific irrigation system pipe pressure ratings.

SHUT'ER DOWN

What is obvious to some may be obscure to others. Begin your winterization by shutting off the water to the irrigation system at the isolation valve. The main shut-off valve to separate the irrigation system from the home's potable water system should either be insulated in a valve box or located inside the home. If there's no isolation valve to separate the irrigation system from the home's potable system, install one. You'll need it to winterize and can really save the property owner an inconvenience if there are future irrigation system problems that require long term care.

Drain valves must be installed at the proper location in the piping system to enlist gravity's assistance. Your system should

Continued on page 4.....

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