

# Getting Equipment Ready to Go

by Gilbert Pena, Marketing Manager, Commercial Mowing, John Deere Turf Care & Steve and Suz Trusty, Trusty & Associates

While many of us will put our mowing equipment to bed for the winter, others will continue in the snow removal season. As you finish storing mowing equipment, go ahead and get snow removal equipment ready to go for that first surprise storm.

A pre-season service for two-cycle machines should start with fresh fuel and oil. To prevent the engine from running hot, make sure to have a proper fuel/oil ratio mix. For models that do not require a fuel/oil mixture, add fresh fuel. Each model's operator's manual will have the exact measurements.

Check the belts on the drive mechanism to ensure that they still move freely and haven't hardened. If the belts have hardened, they're more likely to break during a job, leaving your customer with downtime.

Do not forget to lubricate, adjust and inspect all moving parts and

safety devices before the first use of the season. Safety shields and guards should be in good shape and fastened in place.

To minimize chute clogging, try spraying slip-plate lubricant onto the surface of the chute.

For walk-behind snow removal equipment, make sure that the operator presence system is engaged.

Do not forget about safety. Take the opportunity to remind all operators of important safety precautions. Shop safety posters, for example, are an ideal way to inform your employees and customers about safe operating habits. Those practices include blowing snow away from people, parked cars and buildings; never putting hands in the discharge chute to unclog snow or debris and wearing protective eyewear and clothing. Again, since all models have specific safety features, refer to

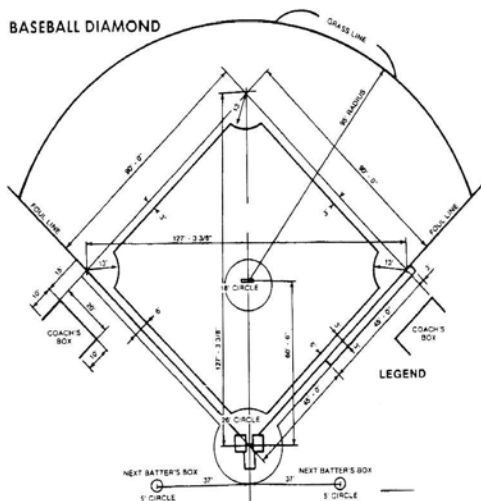
your operator's manuals for important seasonal safety tips.

## Tackling the Equipment

Once the turf preparations for winter have been completed, it's time to concentrate on preparing the equipment. At the end of the mowing season, one of the worst things you can do to a mower or handheld product is to simply "put it up" until the next season. Proper store affects its useful life and reliability.

First and foremost, prepare the fuel system for storage. If left over long periods of time, fuel can deteriorate and turn into a gel or paste-like substance that will clog the fuel lines and varnish the carburetor. You can either run the fuel completely out of the engine, or rotate the fuel shutoff valve and run until the engine dies to empty the carburetor so it does not gum up. If you

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have a full tank of gas left and do not want to burn if unnecessarily, you can add a fuel stabilizer and run the engine for about 10 minutes to ensure that the stabilizer has been mixed with the fuel

Change the oil and the oil filter (if equipped). True, the fresh oil will just sit over the off-season, but it will provide you and opportunity to examine the oil system for any contaminants. If you see anything unusual, you can have the problem repaired during normal downtime and prevent a slow start to the next mowing season. When changing the oil, if you notice milky oil or a shiny sludge in the filter, it is a sign of coolant leakage. If the oil smells burned, it is a sign of overheating. Put a dab of oil on a paper towel: A lighter stain "halo" around the darker stain indicates fuel in the oil. You may also be able to smell the fuel in the filter.

Servicing the air filter system at the end of the mowing season is especially important, if you plan to also use your mowing equipment for fall-cleanup activities such as mulching leaves. Using a mulching mower or a vacuum system makes leaf cleanup quick, but it's also a very tough environment for

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## An example of an accomplishment: It Can Be Done.

As a Northern Michigan University student in the late 1980's, Heather Nabozny tuned in Detroit Tigers radio broadcasts to remind her of home, family and the excitement shared during the team's championship 1984 season. While that World Series run may seem particularly distant for fans of a franchise that lost 119 games in 2003, the 33-year old Milford, Mich., native has never felt closer to the franchise. Armed with a turf-management degree from Michigan State and a track record of success as head grounds keeper for the West Michigan Whitecaps, Nabozny became the first (and remains the only) female head groundkeeper in Major League Baseball history when the Tigers hired her in 2000. Paul Steinbach asked Nabozny how she groomed her own path to the bigs. She is also a Certified Sports Field Manager.

**Q:** What led you to consider this profession?

**A:** At NMU, I thought I wanted to do social work. Then in the summertime, I worked for my father's lawn-care company and he would send his

employees to turf-management seminars. Michigan State was at the one of them talking about its turf-management program, and the light bulb just went on: "Wow, you can go to school for that?"

**Q:** What about turf management appealed to you?

**A:** I am not much of an office person. I do what I have to do here to keep everything organized, but I love to be outdoors. And the reason I steered toward athletic fields is I like to be athletic myself. I run on the warning track during batting practice when the team is in town.

**Q:** Why has groundskeeping traditionally been a male-only field?

**A:** Athletic fields have just come into the forefront as an area of study, and until I took this position there really weren't any women doing athletic turf. I don't think young women really even know anything about managing turf.

**Q:** Do you avail yourself to women wishing to learn?

**A:** There have been women who have called at the suggestion of men: "Hey, call Heather up. You'll probably feel

comfortable talking to her about how to break into the I business and how to move up." To be completely honest, being in the minority gives us a better chance of being remembered. But it's also very important that we do an excellent job. If you're in the spotlight, there's extra pressure.

**Q:** How did you react to the launch of the Unofficial International Heather Nabozny Fan Club?

**A:** It kind of cheeped me out at first. They'd say, "Yeah, we're in your fan club. Can we get our picture taken with you?" Being kind of a private person, it's a little odd to me, but it's also an honor.

**Q:** What kind of player feedback have you gotten for your efforts?

**A:** The younger players who come up are real complimentary, and the others are just kind of out here to do their job. To me, if there's no news, that's good news.<sup>2c</sup>

*Person to Person*

*Athleticbusiness.com, Dec. 2003. ♦*

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engines. The powdery residue, dust and debris can clog the air filter and prevent the machine from working at optimum power. When checking the air filter at such frequent intervals, special care needs to be taken not to break the seal and allow dirt and debris into the engine. To reduce the risk of additional contaminants, watch the air restriction indicator and wipe the area thoroughly before opening the system. Once the system is open, take advantage of the opportunity to inspect for any possible problems. Check intake hoses and the fill canister. Look for cracks, missing washers, seals and loose connections.

It's also recommended to service the spark plug. Remove the spark plug and put 1 ounce of oil in each cylinder. The oil creates a barrier to protect the cylinder wall and makes for easier starting next mowing season. Reinstall the plug, but leave the plug wire off. Then crank or turn the engine over five to six times to ensure that the oil coats the cylinder walls evenly.

Additionally, make sure to remove the battery, if applicable. Clean and charge as necessary, then store in a cool, dry place where it will not freeze.

Removing the battery reduces sources of unintentional engine ignition and will help prolong battery life. If you have a hydrostatic unit, relieve the hydraulic pressure to prevent leakage.

Before putting your equipment away for the season, take time to do a thorough inspection of all safety shields, belts, hoses and hardware to make sure all are present and in good repair. Lubricate all cables and linkages to prevent seizing over the cold season. You can wait to sharpen or replace blades on mowing equipment until the next mowing season. A freshly sharpened blade can rust, requiring yet another sharpening at the beginning of the next season. Clean debris from around the engine cooling fins and then wash. Paint any scratched or roughed up areas to prevent rust. Coating exposed areas with a protective spray such as Fluid Film is also recommended. Then store the equipment in a dry place, or cover the unit(s) to protect from the weather.

Not only can taking the time to store your outdoor power equipment properly add longevity to your equipment fleet, but it can also help identify potential problems that can be corrected in the off-season. ♦

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