

Always Consider the Environment

By Jim Hermann, CSFM

As students of the turf industry we try to read as many articles as we can find on the subject of turf management. We use the information we receive from these articles to help formulate the management programs we implement on the fields we maintain. These articles often times include topics such as aeration technique, selection of topdressing materials, yearly maintenance programs, athletic field renovation etc.

When you evaluate an article, always make sure you consider the similarities and differences in the environment of the field you are reading about and the environment of your own field.

I trust that many of you have found your selves in the following situation. You are trying to decide how to deal with a problem on your field. Not having had personal experience with this particular problem, you base your decision on an article that was written about a similar situation, or so it would seem.

Let's assume your soccer field is constructed on heavy textured native soil. The chemical soil analysis has determined that you have an acceptable pH of 6.5 along with adequate amounts of available phosphorous (P) and potassium (K).

It's September and the soccer league is tearing your field up and you're in a quandary over what to do first. You go to your mailbox and what do you find but the new issue of *Sportsturf*. By sheer coincidence the main article is written about how some facilities management company maintains a world-class soccer field. After you finish reading the article, you commit to a fertilizer program consisting of 8.0 lbs of nitrogen (N) a year along with an obscene amount of P and K and micronutrients you never heard of before. In addition to this you purchase a trailer load of sand from the local supply house to use as a topdressing material. What's wrong with this picture?

The field you are reading about is more than likely constructed on a sand-based root zone. Water is most certainly supplied by an automatic irrigation system. It

is more than likely mowed every other day with a reel mower. It has a slit drainage system, and employs a maintenance crew the size of a small town.

Sand-based root zones have notoriously low water and nutrient holding capacity as compared to heavy textured root zones. A more complete and intensive fertilizer program typically including micronutrients is necessary to supply the turf with what it needs. Nutrients are typically supplied at lower rates and at more frequent intervals than are most heavy textured native soil New Jersey fields.

The sand-based topdressing is supplied with a sieve analysis "compatible" (the key word when discussing topdressing) with the root zone.

Although sand may be indicated as a topdressing material for many fields, its use should never be contemplated without first consulting an agronomist well versed in soil science. The risk of causing more harm than good is extremely high.

If the environment of the field you are reading about differs greatly from your own, the maintenance program is going to differ from your own.

As you enter into decisions concerning maintenance and renovation procedures of your sports turf always ask yourself this question, what am I trying to accomplish? Here is an example. Modification of heavy textured soil with sand is often times recommended as a means of increasing the drainage qualities. What many fail to realize is that in order for drainage to occur, there needs to be a place for the water to go. If your field is not equipped with underground drainage, this procedure may not work.

Whenever making maintenance decisions, "always consider the environment".

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DID YOU KNOW?

Major League Baseball pitchers and catchers may report to spring training on February 14, 2008. And some think it's just Valentine's Day. . .