

# UPDATE

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Sports Field



Managers Association of New Jersey

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# Looking Forward to 2024

## See Inside For:

Looking for success?

Photo Recap: SFMANJ Fall Field Day  
and Green Expo 2023

Meet Kevin Morris

Applying Gypsum

Perspectives in the “North”





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# Welcome! New and Renewed SFMANJ Members for 2023

Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey (SFMANJ) ended 2023 with 256 members. The Association recently generated invoices for 2024 membership dues. If you did not receive an invoice, please contact us at 856.514.3179 or download the membership form available at [www.sfmanj.org](http://www.sfmanj.org). Mail membership dues direct to SFMANJ, PO Box 205, Pennsville, NJ 08070 or send in an email to [mail@sfmanj.org](mailto:mail@sfmanj.org).

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Sports Turf Managers Association



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*SFMANJ does not necessarily support the opinions of those reflected in the following articles.*

Looking for success? Look no further than ...

# YOUR STAFF!

Sports Field Management Association (Formerly Sports Turf Managers Association) Editorial Staff

Your staff has a significant impact on your success. The work that they do is a direct reflection on you, your ability to train, to motivate and to lead. Reaching the goals of your facility is only possible through good management of your people and their continued development. To make sure you are fully embracing the talents of your staff, use these simple techniques.

## Top 10 Strategies to Engage Your Staff

### 1. Seek input and listen.

Your staff is a great resource for ideas and improvements. Asking for their opinions and solutions to problems, truly listening to them, and implementing as appropriate, strengthens their commitment to you and to their job. Involving your staff in decision making builds loyalty and improves retention.

### 2. Set expectations.

Clearly and consistently set expectations for each employee through jointly written performance objectives. Good performance can't happen if they do not understand what you expect. Reinforce your expectations verbally.

### 3. Provide continuous feedback.

Praise accomplishments, large and small, and for those projects that weren't as successful, use them as learning experiences to find out

what could have been done differently. Don't wait until the end of the year at performance time to express dissatisfaction.

### 4. Show appreciation.

Just say "thank you!" When you reward and acknowledge good behaviors, you get more of the same. Publicly acknowledge your staff for doing a good job, and look for other ways to reward their efforts. According to a Harris Poll, the top three satisfaction drivers for employees are control over their work; the opportunity to use their talents and skills; and recognition and appreciation.

### 5. Be accessible.

By being visible and available, you send the message that you are part of the team and are ready to support their efforts to get the job done.

### 6. Train, Train, Train.

Training in the correct procedures and equipment use is critical to getting the job done right, but also for health and safety reasons. The continuous upgrading of skills also provides employees with the means for promotion. Consider training opportunities in areas outside of their core responsibilities, such as in writing skills, public speaking, customer service, business management, etc. You and your facility will reap many benefits from improving their "softer" skills.

*Continued on page 17*

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*Photo  
Recap:*

# SFMANJ Fall Field Day

## Daniel P. Ryan Football Complex

Monroe Twp., NJ • October 25, 2023

Photos by Debbie Savard



Photo by Fred Castenschiold



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# MEET NATIONAL TURFGRASS EVALUATION PROGRAM'S KEVIN MORRIS

Article authored by Cecilia Brown, Sod Solutions

Editor's Note: This article was found under the Industry News section of the Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) website (sportsfieldmanagement.org)

Kevin Morris, executive director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), embarked on his journey in the turfgrass industry back in the early '80s. His career began with a decision to join the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture Research Service (ARS) facility in Beltsville, Maryland, in 1981. His job location was not far from his hometown and just a stone's throw from the University of Maryland in College Park, where he pursued a degree in agricultural economics.

Morris found himself under the mentorship of turfgrass researcher Jack Murray.

"He was very supportive and just had that Southern gentleman type of personality and he just really believed in me and gave me a chance. I really watched and emulated how he operated and then took over from there," Morris said.

Morris' inaugural project involved exploring the use of compost in turfgrass production at a time when Murray was the sole turfgrass specialist within the entire agency. Recognizing the significance of turfgrass research, Murray, along with a group of fellow scientists, laid the groundwork for the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), commencing the inaugural trials in 1980.

In 1982, NTEP embarked on a groundbreaking test of perennial ryegrasses, marking the program's first venture into charging an entry fee for trials. It was during this transformative period that Murray extended a job offer to Morris, who accepted the opportunity to start his career.

From those early technical responsibilities of handling data and orchestrating trial logistics, Morris steadily ascended the ranks within NTEP. His unwavering dedication and commitment to the program's mission eventually led him to the role of executive director, a position he has held since 1998.

## NATIONAL TURFGRASS EVALUATION PROGRAM

NTEP, as Morris describes it, stands as an impartial nonprofit organization, uniting plant breeders, seed companies, sod companies, marketing entities and universities in collaborative research and product testing endeavors. NTEP's vital role entails orchestrating trials, facilitating data collection and analysis and disseminating information freely to the public, without providing recommendations or analysis.

At the helm of NTEP, Morris is committed to ensuring consistency, accuracy and timely information release, all delivered at a reasonable cost considering the expansive scope of data they offer. He oversees the program's extensive network, managing over 250 agreements for trials spanning 35 states, with multiple locations in some.

"The people in this industry are great. They're salt-of-the-earth type of people. They compete with each other, but they don't fight with each other very much," Morris said.

"We all recognize there are things we could do better as far as using less water, using fewer pesticides, less fertilizer and being

more efficient. We try to provide data if the data is there so people can make advances in those areas and put those products on the market so the end-user can use less water, fertilizer and those things."

## NTEP TRIALS

NTEP trials run on five-year cycles for different turfgrass types such as zoysias, centipede grass, tall fescue, and St. Augustine grass, and for specific traits such as the current low-input trial. NTEP organizes an advisory committee of researchers for each trial to get input on what to test for, how to test, trial locations, etc. The committee then puts forth recommendations that set the trial parameters to the NTEP Policy Committee for review.

"We try to keep our ear to the ground, stay involved in groups in the industry to stay up to speed with some of the issues out there and find out what we can address," said Morris.

Members from Turfgrass Producers International, the Sports Field Management Association, the Turfgrass Breeders Association, American Seed Trade Association, the U.S. Golf Association, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and other industry associations work with NTEP and also serve on their governing boards.

"I think our governing board is unique because we have representatives from turf seed groups, universities, various groups from golf, sports turf and sod production. We have a pretty diverse group that is very helpful. I don't know that any other organization has that kind of broad diversity," said Morris.

Morris explained that while some grasses may not survive in certain climates, NTEP can still do ancillary trials to test for particular diseases or insect issues, drought resistance, traffic tolerance and to gather winterkill data. He said it's helpful from an advisory standpoint to have that kind of input and not limit testing to traditional areas only. Most NTEP trials take place on research facility sites so they can control as many variables as possible.

*Continued on page 14*





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# Applying Gypsum - when is it really needed?

Dr. David D. Minner

Gypsum ( $\text{CaSO}_4$ ) is often applied but seldom needed on Iowa [or New Jersey] sports fields. The classic misunderstanding with gypsum arises from its association with improving water movement and soil structure on sodic (high sodium) soils that are not typically found in Iowa [or New Jersey].

Gypsum is correctly used on sodic soils that have undergone a process of deflocculation. In this case, gypsum will likely improve soil structure and water infiltration. A brief review of soil cation exchange capacity (CEC) and soil aggregation may help you understand how this is actually accomplished by gypsum. There are many negatively (-) charged sites on the surface of clay particles. Some of the more important nutrients are positively charged (calcium  $\text{Ca}^{++}$ , magnesium  $\text{Mg}^{++}$ , iron  $\text{Fe}^{++}$  and potassium  $\text{K}^+$ ) and attach themselves to the negatively charged soil particles. These positively charged nutrients are called cations. The CEC is simply a measure of how many negative sites are available to attract the positively charged nutrients or cations.

Soil aggregation is another term you will need to understand to follow this discussion. Small individual soil particles are clumped together to form aggregates or "soil crumbs." Calcium - gypsum is a source of calcium - can cause this granulation to initiate in a process called flocculation, however flocculation alone does not make aggregates stable. Organic matter and other viscous microbial products stabilize soil aggregates. In a well aggregated soil there are larger voids between the "soil crumbs." The larger voids or macropores improve water infiltration.

Now, back to gypsum. The CEC sites in sodic soils are dominated by Na. Other cations that help soil aggregation, such as  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  and  $\text{Mg}^{++}$ , are displaced by  $\text{Na}^+$ . The excessive sodium reverses the process of aggregation and causes the "soil crumbs" to disperse into individual soil particles. The deflocculation that occurs in sodic soils results in a very tight arrangement of individually dispersed soil particles saturated with  $\text{Na}^+$ . Macroporosity is greatly reduced and water infiltration slows to near zero. When wet, sodic soils are slick, sticky, and have poor drainage. When dry they become quite hard. Gypsum is correctly used to remedy this situation caused by excessive sodium in the soil. The  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  in gypsum ( $\text{CaSO}_4$ ) displaces  $\text{Na}^+$  on the exchange site. The  $\text{Na}^{++}$  reacts with sulfate ( $\text{SO}_4^-$ ) to form sodium sulfate ( $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4$ ); a highly water soluble material that is leached from the soil. Removing  $\text{Na}^+$  and replacing  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  on the exchange site reduces deflocculation and allows natural aggregation of particles that eventually restores soil structure. Gypsum is very useful when soil structure deteriorates because of high  $\text{Na}^+$ .

The misconception arises when there is a belief that gypsum can improve structure and drainage in any heavy clay soil, even those not necessarily affected by  $\text{Na}^+$ . A  $\text{Na}^+$  impact on soil structure that requires the application of gypsum only occurs on a small percentage of sports field soils. A soil test will determine the need for gypsum application. The problematic symptoms of sodic soils are very similar to those of heavily trafficked clay soils that are not

affected by  $\text{Na}^+$ ; both are hard and have poor structure and drainage. To add confusion, gypsum is often advertised as a "soil softener" material. Most soil scientists agree that gypsum will not be useful for improving poor permeability due to problems of soil texture, compaction, hardpans, claypans, or high water tables. Most sports field managers should not anticipate a reduction in compaction and improved drainage by using gypsum. Even with this misconception, there are situations where gypsum is useful in sports fields.

Gypsum ( $\text{CaSO}_4$ ) can be used to supply Ca. When pH is above 6.7 and Ca is deficient, gypsum instead of lime ( $\text{CaCO}_3$ ), should be used to supply Ca. Lime applied to an already high pH would further increase pH and may lead to iron deficiency. Gypsum supplies Ca without increasing pH. A suggested target range for Ca in the plant is 0.4 to 1.2%.

Many water supplies are often high in  $\text{Na}^+$ . Sand based systems irrigated with high  $\text{Na}^+$  water may have excessive  $\text{Na}^+$  on the exchange complex. Since sands do not deflocculate, the high  $\text{Na}^+$  in this case will not result in reduced drainage. Sands retain their macroporosity through particle size arrangement rather than by aggregation of particles. The high  $\text{Na}^+$  irrigation water can easily displace  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  and make it deficient in sandy soils with low CEC. Gypsum can be used in this case as a source of  $\text{Ca}^{++}$ . Testing both soil and plants associated with sand based sports turf has revealed that apparently adequate levels of  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  in the rootzone have produced apparently deficient levels of  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  in the plant. Application of gypsum in these situations increased plant calcium and improved turf growth (Dr. David York, personal communication 1998). Calcium availability, uptake, and effect on turfgrass performance in athletic fields continues to be evaluated.

Sodium Chloride ( $\text{NaCl}$ ) is commonly used as a deicer for roadways and sidewalks. Soil Na levels may be elevated in grass areas adjacent to paved surfaces treated with  $\text{NaCl}$  for deicing. Gypsum may be helpful to remove excessive Na from the soil in this situation.

*\* Dr. David D. Minner was formerly Extension Turfgrass Specialist, Iowa State University; and past Board Member, Sports Field Management Association (SFMA).*

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After

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After



# The Sports Turf Manager as a Crisis Communicator



By Sports Field Management Association (Formerly Sports Turf Managers Association) Editorial Staff

Perhaps you will never be faced with responding to a crisis. But, if you ever have an athlete get injured during play, an employee who gets hurt on the job, a disgruntled employee, a weather related disaster, or an environmental incident, you just might find yourself in the spotlight and under scrutiny.

As a manager of people, you may have to deal with an employee's death or illness, a sudden change in top management, or employee issues of sexual harassment. Each one of these can constitute a crisis. You must be prepared for that decisive moment when your response can lead the crisis to better or to worse. An initial negative perception is nearly impossible to reverse.

## Crisis Communication Response Tips

- Respond within 24 hours.
- Don't point fingers.
- Always be available to the media.
- Be visible and on-site.
- Tell the absolute truth.
- Never say "no comment."

You are judged within the first 30 seconds of speaking if you and the information you are providing is trusted. Appearing empathetic and caring are the most important characteristics you can exhibit to show "trustworthiness". Your audience will also assess your competence, your honesty and your commitment. Your goal as a communicator is to demonstrate these attributes.

It is important to recognize that the media is usually more interested in covering opposing viewpoints and that bad news and conflict are more newsworthy. Most reporters are working under a tight deadline, have limited scientific and technical knowledge and can be a bit cynical. When preparing to talk with the media, address the principal underlying concern of the audience/questioner/listener keeping your responses short and concise.

In many crisis situations it is important to bring in a third party and to tell the media who you have contacted.

## Crisis Communication Interviews

- Take control early by educating the reporter and correcting misunderstandings.
- Clarify the questions.
- Prepare two to three main messages.
- Give facts: who, what, when, where, but don't give how and why.
- Express your concern. Safety is always the top priority.
- Avoid jargon and do not use humor.
- Frame your answers in the positive.
- Tell how fast you responded, how much has been done and what you will do about it in the future.
- Thank or give appreciation to any assistance.
- Avoid words with negative connotations such as lethal, risky, deaths, maimed, toxic.
- Do not repeat the "charges" or any negative words, such as no, not, never.

- Be conscious of your body language. Do not place your hands in a "fig leaf" in front or in back of you, but keep your hands/palms open and above the waist. Avoid touching your face, clasping or clenching your hands and pointing your fingers.

## Remember these phrases.

You want to give a sense of more to come, which will help to establish your trustworthiness.

"What I can tell you is ..."

"So far, what we know is ..."

"So far, what we have done is ..."

"What we are planning to do next is ..."

"We will be able to tell you more when ..."

"I'll be glad to talk with you again after we conduct ..."

Source: Susan Santos, Ph.D., FOCUS GROUP, Medford, MA

## Crisis Example and Response

Situation: You have a major event that is being hosted in your stadium the next day. As a set of temporary bleachers is being installed, they collapse and your assistant has been critically injured. A reporter is at the stadium asking what happened and why, and if the event is taking place.

*Continued on page 17*

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# MEET NATIONAL TURFGRASS EVALUATION PROGRAM'S KEVIN MORRIS

Continued from page 7

Over the past 35 years, Morris has seen a lot more grass varieties come into play for NTEP trials. He recalls the first tall fescue trial in 1983 had 30 entries and NTEP's current trial has around 130 entries.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Morris explained that NTEP has a responsibility to look at new products and trends as they come out. It tested some of the first perennial ryegrasses to show what regions they would grow and survive in, and which they would not. NTEP also evaluated which ryegrasses are resistant to gray leaf spot, a disease that emerged in grasses in the mid-1990s. More recently, NTEP has been evaluating zoysia grasses to see if they're suitable for putting greens.

"We bring together diverse stakeholders, not just the plant breeders and the sponsor companies, but also the end users and the university folks. It gives us an opportunity to address a lot of different needs," Morris explained.

## NATIONAL TURFGRASS FEDERATION

NTEP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research organization whose role is to provide information from a data perspective. In addition to his role as executive director at NTEP, Morris is also president of the National Turfgrass Federation (NTF) which is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization. NTF can advocate and lobby at the federal level for research dollars and educate people on turfgrass-related issues and matters.

Running that voluntary, unpaid position, Morris shared that the turf industry has received 50 million federal dollars for turfgrass research over the last 15 to 20 years.

## FUTURE

NTEP is in the midst of a significant data transition, from an old formatted system into a new Turfgrass Trial Explorer database. Their ultimate aim is for this database to become the primary source for accessing information, enhancing its overall functionality. Morris envisions a future where data collection becomes more efficient, with field data seamlessly and swiftly uploaded, in stark contrast to the current process that involves lengthy data analysis before website publication.

One of Morris's top priorities before retirement is optimizing data usability, a goal he's pursuing through collaboration with the University of Minnesota's computer science department via an SCRI grant. Additionally, he's laying the groundwork for the future inclusion of visual data representations from NTEP trials, moving beyond the traditional numerical columns. He looks forward to adapting and expanding the database to incorporate new agricultural technologies, phenotypic information and comprehensive testing of various characteristics.

# 2024 Calendar of Events

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# Photo Recap:

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Photos by Debbie Savard



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# Looking for success? Look no further than ... **YOUR STAFF!**

Continued from page 4

## 7. Empower your staff.

Give them as much information as possible about what and why, and allow them to make decisions appropriate to their work.

## 8. Provide a safe and comfortable working environment.

Don't expect employees to use outdated or faulty equipment. With anxieties at an all time high regarding increased terrorist activity, make sure you have emergency procedures in place to protect the workforce in the event of an attack, and ensure that every employee is aware of these procedures.

## 9. Treat with respect.

Respect and accept each person as an important member of the team.

## 10. Inspire your staff.

Be a coach and a cheerleader. Be sure your boss knows about the good work they do. When you help them succeed, you succeed.

*Sports Field Management Association (SFMA), Lawrence, KS*



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# The Sports Turf Manager as a Crisis Communicator

Continued from page 13

Your first response must show concern for the worker and his family. "Our first concern is for Joe Smith and his family. Joe's safety and the safety of all of our workers is always our top priority. What we do know is that a temporary set of bleachers being installed here at King Stadium collapsed about an hour ago. Joe has been taken to Mercy Hospital."

So far, we have cordoned off the area to protect the public. A team of OSHA inspectors are on their way. We'll cooperate in any way to find out what happened. We have also called in a safety engineer to help. We will be able to tell you more about the accident after OSHA and our safety engineer has evaluated the situation.

Your response to whether or not the event will be held the next day depends upon your management teams' decision. If you are going ahead with it, you need to respond with how you are insuring fan safety: "We are going ahead with the concert tomorrow; however to insure the safety of our rock fans, we will be limiting the seating to the built-in seats in the stadium grandstands and offering on-the-floor seating in the end zone." If you are not going ahead, "We will not be holding the concert tomorrow. Fan safety is paramount and until we know why the bleachers collapsed, we will not be holding any events."

We appreciate the help of the city's emergency response team. I'll be glad to talk with you again when we know more.

*Sports Field Management Association (SFMA), Lawrence, KS*

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# Sports Field Perspectives in the "North"

by Bernard Luongo

*Editor's Note: This article was developed by the author when he was a Sports Field & Grounds Manager at a New Jersey Board of Education and previously ran in SFMANJ Update; the author is now retired*



Whenever things get a little rough around the edges, I always take a few steps back to reflect about the property that I work on. It is a vast entity with the wildest critters you ever did see. Now we can talk about some of the wildlife that inhabit our property. On any given day our collection of feral cats is sitting motionless at woods edge hunting up breakfast. It does not take long to see them prancing across the field with a mouse or a mole. They are good at what they do. I guess they would have to be. Every spring one of them will have a litter in the open section of our pole barn. The noise mixes in well with the nesting birds that take up residence in the rafters. Future breakfast I'm sure.

We have a large herd of deer and one very large lucky buck that roam early in the morning. On several occasions a doe will run in front of our utility cart and startle us a bit. It is quite a site being that close to such a beautiful animal. Along the same path are rabbits and squirrels everywhere. In our retaining basins are ducks, geese (not so much of them anymore since we got a service in here. It really works) snapping turtles and regular ones along with, at times, what seems like a thousand frogs. But our trophy frog pond is the basin that drains our irrigated football field. They are as large as a fist. We need to keep our right of ways mowed next to our farmer neighbor's property and this is where our family of red fox live. When we cross paths we are both shocked. Thankfully they take off quickly.

I can easily say I have seen the largest groundhogs of my life on this property. Occasionally they take up residence by the school and we have to call a service in to trap them. We have a family of skunks also that live under the goat's house by our Ag. Dept. We see them roaming around when we get here before daybreak. Don't want to see them in the daylight, that's another problem in itself. We have not seen any opossums or raccoons, but I'm sure they are here.

A bear was sighted across the street in mid-September but he did not make it on to our property yet. Some type of falcon/hawks are always diving at small birds and knocking them out of the sky. That happens a lot in our back fields. Watching the large buzzards dry their wings in the morning sun is always an eerie site. I think our sunrises and sunsets rival those at the shore at times. One of my favorite sites is when the fog drifts across the fields in the morning. The clear layer just above the field, the center fog, then clear above. You almost expect a pirate ship to float across through the fog. Our cross country track runs through the woods and around a 3 acre pond that houses small bass and catfish. A few years back we had a couple of beavers. They disappeared but left their handy work. Plenty of snakes back there also. There is so much more to all our properties than athletic fields. There is mowing, seeding, fertilizing, lining, and setting up goals. But take the time out to see the other side of your property. It is alive and beautiful and you all make it that way. Sometimes it takes the edge off a stressful day, and it is always there just waiting to be noticed.

On a lighter note in a previous article about running the lines. I extended a perimeter line about 50 feet beyond the playing surface. They did not run off the grid. They stayed true to form and ran the perimeter lines. Experiment failed. Maybe I should have used a circle.

Until next time. Keep on turfing.

*Bernard Luongo is an SFMANJ past-President, a recipient of the SFMANJ Dr. Henry Indyk Memorial Award and a current member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors.*

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