

# SOD PRODUCER NEWS

## Volcanic ash doesn't seriously affect Washington sod growers

Washington sod growers, hit hardest by the eruption of Mount St. Helens, did not suffer much from volcanic ash, although complications are still arising from its remains.

Most of the state's sod growers live east of the Cascade Mountains and away from the heaviest streak of ash which dropped across the center of the state. This area still shows the remnants of a snowfall of material like talcum powder that is beginning to kill some lawns and create an unsightly crust on others.

Clark & Sons, a grower in Spokane, has received calls from homeowners in selling areas 30 to 80 miles away since they discovered their lawns were insured. A heavy rain in the area after the ash fell turned it into an impenetrable crust that blocked sunlight and additional water from the turf.

Dr. Roy Goss, a research turf agronomist with the Western Washington Research and Extension Center in Puyallup, said the impact on the sod grower was very minimal. He said a grower in Castle Rock, north of Portland, OR, had just seeded and netted

his farm when the third eruption hit. He was forced to take up the netting, plow the ash over, and reseed—a costly project.

Except in this area and the Moses Lake-Ritzville area in central Washington, the ash filtered fairly well into the ground. Its potash, iron, and small amounts of phosphorus are useful to the soil. Yet it is "physically very poor—structureless—and may require more aerifying and maybe wetting agents to reduce surface tension and let water filter in," says Goss.

A high iron and zinc content could cause a slow death, says Dale Kenyon, owner of Elite Sod Farm in Richland. "If it had turned hot after, it would've caused a lot of damage." He said a 9-square-foot roll, which normally weighs 25 to 30 pounds, is weighing 60 to 70 pounds and becomes impossible to harvest.

Because of its abrasiveness, the ash has damaged tractor blades and ruined motors. Farmers have increased lubrications and oil changes and promptly replaced clogged air filters.

## Pros view research results at Texas turfgrass field day

Recent research shows that more than two million homeowners in Texas maintain turfgrasses and are interested in ways to do a better job at it, professionals were told who attended a turfgrass field day at Texas A&M University in May.

Statistics total the land area with turfgrasses for functional, recreational, and aesthetic purposes at about 3.1 million acres. It costs about \$620 million each year to establish and maintain these turfs.

"Energy and non-renewable resources devoted to maintaining all these turfgrasses will be of increasing concern as supplies become more limited and costs increase," said Dr. James Beard, professor of turfgrass physiology with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and Texas A&M.

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