

# CONFUSION REIGNS OVER FEDERAL, INDUSTRY TURF EQUIPMENT REGS

By Thomas Paciello, equipment editor

Confusion over which safety standards commercial turf care equipment manufacturers should follow is the heart of a 10-year disagreement between the manufacturers and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

In 1971, OSHA adopted the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) B71.1 standard, "Safety specifications for power lawn mowers, lawn and garden tractors, and lawn tractors." However that standard was developed for consumer mowers and commercial equipment was excluded from its scope. This led to certain problems where non-consumer mowers were being used in an OSHA workplace.

Matters were further complicated since there have been several revisions to ANSI B71.1 after the 1968 version. These later revisions deleted the notice that the standard did not pertain to commercial equipment. While the federal OSHA adheres to the 1968 version, some state OSHA programs have adopted the later versions resulting in conflicts between state and federal OSHA requirements. (The latest version of B71.1, completed in 1980, excludes commercial equipment from its scope.)

In an effort to rectify this situation, the American National Standards Committee on Safety Standards for Lawn Mowers, Snow Throwers, Power Edgers and Trimmers, Garden Tractors, and Related Equipment and Attachments, B71,

formulated American National Standard B71.4, "Safety specifications for commercial turf care equipment." The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) has sponsored the project since its inception in 1956.

The standard states, "The safety specifications in this standard apply to powered walk-behind, towed, and ride-on machines intended for marketing as commercial turf care equipment." In the appendix it is noted that the standard "was developed to provide a set of uniform voluntary requirements specifically addressing commercial turf equipment. In the past there has been confusion as to whether this equipment should be designed to conform to ANSI B71.1 or to agricultural or industrial equipment standards."

It would seem that the next logical step would be for OSHA to drop ANSI B71.1 and adopt B71.4. According to OSHA it is not that simple. The agency must first be petitioned to change the standard. It then checks to see if the reasons are worthy and if so, it goes through the "rulemaking" procedure. In rulemaking a proposal is developed, public hearings held and comments on whether the change is appropriate are gathered from all the parties with a vested interest.

"We're locked-in to the standard we have now and the only way we can get out of it is to go through rulemaking," said one OSHA official. "We can't arbitrarily say we are going to adopt this (B71.4) standard. We are bound by administrative law to go through the proper process."

Not all manufacturers are in complete agreement with OSHA's stand. "It's ridiculous for OSHA not to adopt the commercial turf care standard," said Gilbert Brown, Bunton, Inc., Louisville, KY. "In 1971 they adopted what was available (B71.1). Now that a more applicable standard is available they should adopt that." Brown was a member of the Engineering Specifications Subcommittee of B71 that developed B71.4.

The majority of manufacturers contacted by WTT noted that they were in favor of voluntary safety specifications. One of the main fears of federal regulation was that it would lead to increased manufacturing costs. (Commercial turf care equipment manufacturers who also make consumer equipment are still reeling from CPSC's decision to make deadman controls mandatory on consumer mowers.)

Noting CPSC's strict (and expensive) rules to protect the mower user, commercial equipment manufacturers believe that the operators of their equipment are more skilled. "Keep in mind that

Don Broman  
OMC Lincoln



the people who operate commercial equipment are more qualified and their age bracket is more manageable," said Don Broman, OMC-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE. "They are usually between 18 and 65 so you don't have to worry about the safety of children. There are no 12 year-olds running commercial mowers."

Howard Price, Howard Price Equipment Co., Chesterfield, MO, pointed out that increased federal regulation might cause a problem with the specifications of older machinery that was manufactured under another standard.

While most manufacturers downplayed the importance of federal regulations, they were in almost total agreement that industry standards are important. "From a liability standpoint, integrity standpoint and customer-relations standpoint, it is very important that we comply with all



**Ron Stolley**  
OMC Lincoln

the standards that we can," said OMC-Lincoln's Ron Stolley. Howard Price added that "buyers want to know that we follow some type of official specifications."

The commercial turf care equipment industry has plans to make voluntary regulations even more enticing to the manufacturers. ANSI B71.4 is currently being revised to correct any sections that are open to multiple interpretations. When that is done (probably sometime in 1982, according to OPEI technical director Ed Mentz) OPEI will institute a safety seal program for companies that manufacture their equipment in accordance with the revised standard.

"We want a reasonable safety standard and still be able to cut grass," said Bunton's Brown. "A lot of time was put in (to B71.4) and I think it's a good start."

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