

NAILING THE CULPRIT

With an efficient equipment tracking system, those lost and broken hand tools swiftly become a thing of the past.

by Jay Holtzman, contributing editor

Even the smallest landscape company or golf course can easily have tens of thousands of dollars tied up in equipment.

Because of this, virtually all landscape managers and golf course superintendents must come up with a system to track the use—and sometimes abuse—of their equipment.

Beyond being able to accurately track daily use of equipment, such

equipment control systems can range from simple to elaborate, from informal to rigidly structured.

Keeping it simple

An informal system works best for The Caretakers of Egan, Minn. According to president Thomas Mann, "We don't have a lot of crews running in all directions, nor do we have the variety of equipment some con-

tractors have." That's because of the size and nature of the business: specialization in maintenance of commercial and industrial properties with no design work.

Yet even with a fairly specialized business, Mann has more than \$150,000 worth of equipment, including a variety of front-mount and belly-mount equipment, walk-behind mowers, various hand tools and small power tools such as chain saws and aerators.

"Each mowing crew has a base line of equipment that it needs every day, and every truck has a complete set of that equipment," Mann says. "The crews get their mowers and tractors for the day each morning and they must return them each evening, but there is no formal check-out system. We're small enough that abuse or loss of the equipment isn't a problem for us. We've talked about putting in a more formal system, but we just haven't gotten around to it."

Informal ways to track equipment, however, work well for him.

"One of the things we did to quickly check for missing equipment was to install tool racks on the back of each truck for the shovels, rakes and so on, so that with a quick glance you can see if the truck is fully equipped with the tools they need to lug around every day," Mann explains. "But for the most part, we have steady long-term employees, so we haven't had a problem with theft or equipment abuse."

Getting sophisticated

Even large, sophisticated tracking systems such as the one operated by DeLaurentis Construction of Mamaroneck, NY, still depend to some degree on the cooperation and goodwill of employees.

"We have a lot of people who have been with us for a long time—they're like family—and they look out for our interests," says Mary DeLaurentis.

Every piece of equipment has a use file, she explains: when in use, for how long, all maintenance and repairs. "All equipment appears on an equipment list with a code number for each piece. The code number is also inscribed on the tool, and this number is recorded each day that a tool is used. A daily charge is made at a specific hourly rate to every job for each

DeLaurentis Construction Co., Inc.
335 Center Avenue, Mamaroneck, New York 10543

DAILY FIELD REPORT
FOREMAN ED JAZINET

JOB # 101-SUMMIT, VACAVILLA

WEATHER: CLEAR RAIN
DATE 05 04 87
DAY M T W T F S

DIARY

- 1. Disputed Work
- 2. Accident
- 3. Verbal Orders
- 4. Delays
- 5. Extra Work
- 6. Subcontractors
- 7. Contract work

USE OTHER SIDE FOR COMMENTS

LABOR

LAST NAME	UNION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTALS
SMITH, A	60															
JONES, B	436															
BROWN, C	137															
JAZINET, E																
DELAURENTIS, J	137															

LIST WORK DONE TODAY

DESCRIPTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTALS
NON ITEMIZED SUPER															
EXCAVATION															
LABOR															
TRUCKING															
MECHANIC															
YARD															
OFFICE															

EQUIPMENT

DESCRIPTION	CLASS ID	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTALS
BACKHOE	BH4															
KOMATSU	BH5															

MATERIALS USED — DESCRIPTION

PECKHAM RECEIPT # 2.005 3/4" STONE

At DeLaurentis Construction Co., a daily log sheet is used to track what tools are signed out to whom each day. That employee is responsible for returning it in good condition.

piece of equipment used on that job.”

A fleet manager is responsible for the more than 40 pieces of large equipment the company operates. Another manager is responsible for the daily assignment of smaller power equipment (up to and including equipment the size of backhoes) and hand tools.

Tools are signed out each day to an individual who is responsible for that tool and responsible for returning it in good condition at the end of the day. For convenience and efficiency, small tools are kept in trailers at various job sites, but the individual is still responsible for them. Drivers are responsible for all the equipment on their trucks.

This careful paperwork system is backed up by monthly meetings with employees.

“Every month, we have a meeting of all the people who take out equipment. We review what has gone on during the previous month and discuss any cases of misuse or vandalism,” DeLaurentis explains. “The bottom line is that we are a family-operated company and everyone knows that if there is a problem they will have to answer to the main man.

“Pilferage or misuse of equipment was a problem years ago when we were smaller and growing. We got notes from employees that so-and-so had built a house on our time and with our materials. But that isn't the case any more. With our system and family operation of the business, we have good control of it now.”

Avoiding congestion

“The tool thing can get away from you quickly if you don't have control,” says Kevin Downing, development director of Willoughby Golf Club, a new 18-hole residential club in Stuart, Fla. “In this new development, we have gone to a tighter system for better control.

“Before coming here, I sat down with my assistant and we looked at what we were doing and asked how we could do it better. Any problem we had with equipment was with smaller items worth \$300 or less—string trimmers, that type of thing. So we put in a new tool system here and designed the building to accommodate it.”

Storage areas for power tools and hand tools are at opposite ends of the new building. “We have a line of demarcation between where someone goes to pick up a power tool and where he goes to pick up a hand tool,” Downing says. This cuts congestion in the morning when crews are drawing their equipment for the day and also reduces the opportunities for workers to loiter where tools are kept.

“All power tools are checked out to



Mann: His smaller company uses an informal system to track equipment use and performance.

the employee by the mechanic since he is the person who sees the tool all the time and he knows the condition of it,” Downing explains. “We deal with hand tools more casually—they're marked by department and the individual goes in and gets his own. We've found that the close tracking of hand tools just isn't worth the time and expense.”

Along with the new physical layout, Downing is trying a new system for making work assignments that he believes will have a positive impact on the way equipment is handled. “We are giving some of our people standing work assignments so that they will have ongoing responsibility for a ‘station,’ a particular group of holes on the course, for example. A person will spend perhaps 24 hours a week on his station doing routine jobs. This individual will get the same set of tools for his station work every day.

“We hope the person will be a little more responsible for the way he takes care of them. This also gives us a convenient check—we know who had what piece of equipment—and it cuts down on finger pointing.”

Contractors and superintendents should also keep good equipment use



Rom: Chapel Valley's tracking system includes a bonus program tied into equipment condition.

records for their own protection in case of lawsuits, Downing points out.

“You need some kind of system so that if an employee or former employee comes back and sues the company because he claims he was injured while using a particular piece of equipment, you can look back at your records and see, in fact, what that person was working with,” says Downing.

Color-coding tools

Probably the most effective system is one that combines firm control of equipment with strong employee motivation. Like the system at Chapel Valley Landscape of Woodbine, Md.

“We put a lot of effort into our system and spend a lot of money on it,” says Chapel Valley executive vice-president Stewart Rom. “It gives us a minimal amount of downtime on the equipment and great image on our equipment.”

The fundamentals of the system are simple: all equipment is assigned by crew, and each crew has its own set of equipment.

“We don't do a lot of in-and-out sharing of equipment,” Rom continues. “Each crew operates with its own set of equipment. We've found over the years that with this arrangement you get less damage to your equipment and less argument and discussion about who did what to whom.”

The use of some shared equipment like earth augers is scheduled during weekly meetings of the project managers and their foremen. And there is also some check-out equipment, Rom explains, such as chain saws and sod cutters, that are kept in a locked cage. That equipment must be issued by a project manager.

The same basic system operates for large equipment, too.

“Our larger landscaping equipment we operate with a pick-up truck or a large tandem truck, a trailer and a backhoe. The crew rolls with that set of equipment, it belongs to that crew, including the backhoe, and there is no sharing,” Rom says.

The equipment lasts longer, too. Rom has found that backhoes are ruined with more than one or two operators. “You spend more money repairing it than you do anything else,” he says.

To handle routine maintenance and keep the crew-assigned equipment system intact, Chapel Valley keeps entire sets of equipment as spares.

“We have rotation equipment that a crew uses when we service their rig for preventive maintenance purposes. They trade off the whole rig, leaving

their trailer and taking ours with all the spare equipment," Rom says.

And to keep track of equipment belonging to each crew, all equipment and trucks are color-coded so that every piece of equipment has a permanent home on a given truck.

"The company is divided into departments and branches," Rom explains. "Each branch has a color assigned to it, and every tool in the branch has a color stripe of that color. Then each truck within the branch has a second color assigned to it, and

every tool on that truck also carries a stripe of that color. One color band is two inches wide and the other is one inch wide." Tools are painted in the same colors as the truck to which they are assigned. Finally, a complete list of the tools assigned to that truck is mounted on the truck's side and covered with plastic as a permanent record of that truck's tool inventory.

Inventory at Chapel Valley is taken quarterly, during which time everyone must account for their tools.

"If you need a replacement for a

tool due to wear and tear, you return the old tool to our internal company store and we issue a new tool. If you've lost a tool, we fill out a sheet that records that fact, issue a new tool, and charge the crew for it from an accounting point of view," Rom continues. (Crews are not directly charged for such tools.)

The whole record-keeping system gets strong support from a bonus system that rewards those crews that have taken good care of their tools.

Says Rom: "We tally what tools a crew has lost during the year, and this effects the bonus that each member receives." A perfect record earns 100 percent of the bonus; lost tools cause a reduction of the bonus.

Most recently, the company has begun putting the name of the foreman on the side of his truck to add a further note of identity between man and equipment, and to instill even more pride.

A sense of pride

Rick Haas, course superintendent at Corpus Christi (Texas) Country Club believes that it is an employee's pride in his work and a feeling of responsibility that is the key element in assuring good equipment treatment.

"It's the mechanic's job when a mower comes back to check that the oil is right and that it has been greased properly and that sort of thing, and to go ahead and do those things if they haven't been done," Haas says. "Then it is also the responsibility of the employee who will be using the equipment the next day to run through the same set of checks again before he uses it. That way, we are checking it two or three times before it is used."

But the real key is "that they want to feel like they are important and appreciated and that it is important to do their job right," Haas continues. "You've got to give them responsibility and work with them, and it takes some time."

Haas uses a big scheduling board in the employee lunchroom to keep employees informed about the jobs they'll be doing.

"I try to get them involved by showing them what has to be done for the whole month and what equipment we will be using. This way, they begin to feel like they are involved in the overall performance of the golf course. I also explain to them that if we can keep our overall costs down, it will mean more for them—a better raise at the end of the year.

"Overall, if you get the respect of your employees and you respect them one-on-one, they are going to treat your equipment with respect, too." **LM**

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