

# Safety vs. time vs. money: the rec facility 'Catch 22'

**Half of the word 'budget' is 'get.' Here are some suggestions on how to 'get' enough money for your facility.**

■ "Kids have as much right to expect safely maintained fields as professionals do," says Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Parks & Recreation Department. "The ability to play shouldn't affect the safety of the fields.

"That's put us in a real dilemma: to work on limited budgets and still maintain a level of public expectations. And television has increased those expectations. That becomes a very challenging demand. Everyone wants their kid's field to look like Wrigley Field or Mile High Stadium."

Moellendorf has four people (including three seasonals) to maintain 11 scattered ballfields.

"Liability and litigation have changed the concept of our profession," he says. "Fields they used to play on no longer



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meet the expectations of today."

So what is the answer?

"We have to work smarter and harder," Moellendorf observes. "We have to become salesmen and campaigners to include maintenance dollars in the budget. The best way to do that is to hang our hats on

the safety issue.

"We also have to campaign with the public; they put too much emphasis on appearance and not enough on playability and safety."

Moellendorf believes that there should be a maintenance and safety audit conducted on every new project. "It sounds basic, but I'll guarantee it's not always done. It's not always easy, either."

Mark Doble of Western Sod has some suggestions for dealing with budget considerations.

"Half of the word 'budget' is 'get,'" he says. "It's a show-and-tell: 'If you give me this, I'll give you this.'"

Doble says that you have to sell yourself before you can sell your department and projects. "Please keep off the grass" is, literally, a sign of the times," he notes.

Doble says you must have a plan of attack:  
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## 18 tips for saving money on athletic fields

■ Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Department of Parks and Recreation and Greg Petry of the Waukegan (Ill.) Park District make these suggestions for saving time and money:

**1)** Develop standards for employees. Bring people in for training rather than sending out employees.

**2)** Work with other entities, like school districts, to share facilities.

**3)** Put more emphasis on general-purpose fields. Pitcher's mounds, for instance, are temporary on Green River's fields, so the fields can be used for more than baseball diamonds.

**4)** Try to use native materials whenever possible.

**5)** Try pre-germinated seed, a proven time-saver.

**6)** Use multi-purpose equipment. Moellendorf's district has a sweeper used for winter sidewalks that is also used as a dethatcher during the summer. It "does a fairly good job," he observes.

**7)** Work with local sports organizations. In Green River, the Little League association purchased home run wall fencing. Petry also asked the Waukegan baseball association to include extra fees and kick back money for field maintenance.

**8)** Work with staff, management and

commissioners, to develop a priority list, a "total evaluation of costs and benefits."

**9)** "Look at the big picture," Petry suggests. Look at how each dollar is spent, including employee raises (merit raises only?) and liability insurance increases.

**10)** Make a public relations effort in the community. "There are certain things we're going to have to give and to take away from the public," Petry notes. "We have to balance everything, and that's the hard part because it affects people."

**11)** Take advantage of early-pay discounts, and ask vendors for bigger discounts.

**12)** Take bids on any major service or purchase. "If you really make these guys sharpen their pencils, they will," Petry says.

**13)** Put clamps on absenteeism, and control overtime.

**14)** Focus on work simplification, keeping to the same routines.

**15)** Focus on preventive maintenance.

**16)** Minimize defects. "If you don't have time to do it right the first time, you don't have time to re-do it," Petry says.

**17)** Make sure employees are oriented to equipment, safety, etc.

**18)** Ask vendors if your fields can be used as experimental areas.

—J.R.

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will stick to the seeds, making it easier to achieve a more even seed distribution.

**8)** Distribute the seeds by "feeding the chickens". We do not recommend using a rotary-type seed machine that fits across the chest as the tiniest seeds shift to the bottom, and results in poor distribution.

**9)** Drag the site with a fence weighted by a heavy pole or roll with a water-filled drum if the site is large.

**10)** Mulch with a fine layer of pine straw or hay to hold the seeds in place and discourage raiding by birds.

**11)** Water the site if possible.

**12)** The cotyledons and "true leaves" should begin to show in five to six weeks.

**13)** If grass or weeds become a problem, apply the herbicide Poast as recommended, disturbing the site as little as possible.

**14)** Do not mow the site until the annuals have set seed. Set the mower blade high enough to leave the leaf rosette of the perennials which will serve as a green ground cover during the winter.