

# Winter a time to plan ahead, hit the books

by STEVE & SUZ TRUSTY

Carefully planned and executed winter projects help lay the groundwork for success in the coming season. And they don't necessarily have to be outdoor projects, either.

Begin with a review of last year's programs, and how you got things done. Evaluate how efficient and effective your current programs are, and formulate a game plan for the coming year.

Divide projects into indoor and outdoor categories. Determine which projects, or segments of projects, must be handled by management and which can be assigned to specific crew members.

## Educate and train

1) Establish in-house training programs. Review standard safety policies and procedures. Designate a part of the shop area as a demonstration area, a place where crew persons can practice and perfect routing procedures. Involve the crew each step of the way, and consider their comments and suggestions.

A demonstration area will let them time specific procedures using different steps or when performed by one-, two- or three-person crews.

2) Develop an accurate labor tracking method for certain tasks. If data is available, analyze labor efficiency over the past few years.

3) Analyze the past year's information, and compare results on specific sites with the amount of equipment, labor and materials invested. Would an upgrade of tools

or equipment, or the addition of some equipment, reduce, although not necessarily eliminate, labor time? At what point would such purchases be cost ef-

PRIORITY LEVEL:     Urgent     Essential  
                               Before use     Aesthetic fix

Facility name: .....

Location: .....

Area to repair: .....

Action required: .....

Vehicles required: .....

Tools required: .....

Other materials: .....

Labor required: .....

Time to complete: .....

Other needs: .....

Special notes: .....

Assigned to: .....

Date assigned: .....

Date completed: .....

Materials used: .....

Time expended: .....

▲ The job starts with the work order. Make it specific, including estimated time required to get the job done.

effective? Decide where service levels can remain where they are, and where they must be cut or increased.

## Job descriptions accurate?

1) Learn where you can improve indi-

vidual initiative and employee commitment to their careers.

During the course of employment, people can take on or neglect duties through no fault of their own. Are employees making the desired personal advances in skill and responsibility? Meet with managers and crew leaders to discuss problems, strategy and ways to improve. Meet with all members of your team during the off-season as you plan for the new year.

2) Attend winter meetings and seminars when possible. If your budget prohibits full staff attendance at a seminar, make sure you or another company representative attends, and brings back plenty of helpful information.

Your trade show plan should allow ample time for personnel to visit both the show floor and seminars.

3) Networking is often overlooked by green industry professionals. Discuss common problems with your peers to reduce your adventures in "trial and error" management.

## General projects important

1) Walk through all facilities, and make note of areas that need cleaning and repair. Assign priorities to these tasks.

2) Take advantage of mild winter days to clean up grounds and facilities; repair fences; maintain parking lots, walkways and cart paths; work on building exteriors; and prune or remove trees and shrubs.

In bad weather, clean up and otherwise organize indoor areas. Wash or paint those dingy walls. Clean that floor. Get rid of all trash, including those faded notes hanging on the walls that you have not referred to in months, or even years.

3) Post all important information in a conspicuous, common area. Beyond all required safety notices, include weekly and daily crew assignments, vacation schedules, upcoming events that affect staff levels or workloads. Devise a workable method of getting individual messages to crew mem-

bers, such as a file or box each person, or a message rack with a slot for each person.

4) **Tackle** the small details. Repair a shaky tool handle. Repaint chipped or damaged mower decks. Lubricate all moving parts, and sharpen those mower blades.

#### Track tools & inventory

1) **Implement or develop** a computer system. Are you using your computers to their full advantage? Use a business analysis program such as Power Point to plan budgets and keep records. How closely do actual spending and use patterns match projections and budgets?

2) **Compare** ending inventories to last year's ending inventory and ordering frequency. Note any discrepancies and unusually heavy use. Find a way to monitor use and reduce waste.

3) **Refine** your equipment and tool tracking system. Small hand tools can be checked out to each crew member for the season, or assigned to specific crews and kept with that crew's equipment and supplies.

4) **Upgrade** systems of equipment allocation and supply usage. Track material

used for all accounts, areas or athletic fields.

#### Prioritize materials

1) **Analyze** material use patterns over the last several years and explore cost saving alternatives. If storage space is available, would larger initial orders earn discounts? If space is limited, is can any time or costs be saved by placing a series of orders for delivery at specific future dates?

Have certain items been hard to find or in limited supply during the rush of the season? (Turf seed might fall into this category in 1996.)

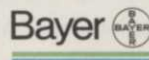
Would it be cost effective to keep these items on hand for use as required? Would it be beneficial to establish set "order points" on some frequently-used items? □

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## Storage strategy

- ▶ Clean and organize storage areas.
- ▶ Allow room for incoming supplies.
- ▶ Think about how, why and when materials are used.
- ▶ Allocate prime space to items used most often.
- ▶ Put lesser-used items on higher or lower shelves, or "in the back."
- ▶ Don't disregard the importance of labels.
- ▶ Set up pegboard racks for shared hand tools—draw an outline of tools on the pegboard. It's simple, but effective!
- ▶ Dry-applied materials must be off the ground. Put seed or smaller bagged materials in bins or sealed cans.
- ▶ Clean and organize the shop and equipment repair areas. If equipment is always parked or stored in a specific place, mark the floor to designate that area.

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