KC airport's controlled burn aids native grasses, forbs

Airport workers used leaf blowers to make sure the controlled burn stayed that way.

The Kansas City Aviation Department's recent controlled burn at the Kansas City International Airport should enhance the appearance and health of the native grasses there. The program involves planting and cultivating native grasses, forbs and flowers to foster a natural environment and improve wildlife habitat. Lower maintenance costs and less fertilizer and herbicide use are other benefits.

Taking care to gauge wind speed, airport workers started the controlled burn along the inbound parkway at the airport during off-peak airport times. Air traffic controllers used the airport's three runways to prevent aircraft from taking off and landing in the smoke. Workers used leaf blowers to "corral" the fire, and keep adjacent "regular" grass from igniting, while water supplies were ready if the fire spread too far.

"Fire has always been a factor determining which plants grow in prairies, and it can control most woody plants and herbaceous weeds," says Jerry Brown, field maintenance superintendent for the Aviation Department.

"At the same time," adds Brown, "[fire] can stimulate desirable plants by reducing competition from cool-season grasses. These grasses use large quantities of soil moisture and nutrients that could be available for native warm-season grasses, which are more productive and moisture-conserving."

Aviation Department Field Maintenance personnel determined that it is likely that the typical method of contending with the grass produces more pollutants than the actual burning. When smoke is produced from grass fires, it is composed mostly of water vapor, carbon, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and very small amounts of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons. There is little long-term effect on air quality because of the low levels of possible pollutants, says the Department, which suggests that mowing the grass, raking, baling and hauling the bales to storage produces pollution from the internal combustion engines. □

Pest forecast 'decision support' tool released

Pest Forecasting Group Inc. (PFG) of Wilmington, DE/Falls Church, VA, and Data Transmission Network (DTN) of Omaha, NE, have combined to offer PFG's new turf pest forecasting service, PestForeCast, to DTN's subscribers via their satellite information delivery system.

The first of PFG's three new turf management decision-support tools, PestForeCast-Turf Insects, premiered with DTN in June. PestForeCast-Turf Diseases is scheduled to be released this summer, and PestForeCast-Turf Weeds will be available in the spring of 1998.

PFG's PestForeCast-Turf Insects advisory service provides subscribers with a series of weekly national maps forecasting the likely presence and activity of each of 16 major turf insect pests. Each map represents PFG's estimate of the likelihood that a damaging stage of a particular insect species is present and can be found by scouting at any site in each of the 344 U.S. climate zones.

Using current weather data, degree-day modeling, and insect growth phenologies, PFG employs Geographic Information System technology to color code each zone to show four levels of estimated risk for turf damage and the growth stage of the insect posing that risk. PFG monitors the annual development of such well known turf insect pests as chinch bugs, sod webworms, mole crickets, and Japanese beetles, along with lesser known but equally damaging species like masked chafers, black turfgrass ataenius, and cutworms, so turf managers don't have to waste valuable time record keeping and calculating the accumulated degree-days needed to best employ some of today's new environmentally friendly biological or biology-based control materials.

For all industry categories

PestForeCast-Turf Insects can be used by all levels of turfgrass management from innovative IPM strategies on environmentally sensitive highly managed