

# Audit now, save later

BY RON HALL/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**N**obody can predict this growing season's weather but it's a good bet that some areas of the country will get too little rain. Given that reality you should prepare for dry weather and the stress that it brings. The stress isn't restricted to the ornamentals and turfgrass that you maintain but it affects you, too, in the form of landscape watering bans and restrictions. This can harm the way you do business and how you serve your customers.

## Don't wait until it's too late

Now's the time to check irrigation systems to see that they function efficiently. Crucial to this process is an "irrigation audit" (in fact, mandated in many areas) that will point the way to making sure that your landscapes are getting the amount of water they need to remain healthy, and not wasting water and money.

Dr. James McAfee, as extension turfgrass specialist with Texas A&M University, educates professionals and consumers alike on how to use irrigation more efficiently and still have good turfgrass. He estimates that irrigation issues now demand about 40% of his professional time.

As part of this process McAfee and colleagues have conducted audits on dozens of irrigation systems. In auditing a system (we'll explain the steps to do an audit in May's *Landscape Management*), McAfee places catch cans in various locations within a landscape or athletic field, allows the sprinkler system to run, then measures how much water is being delivered to the different areas that are being irrigated.

## Too much is too much

Too often the results aren't encouraging.

"The biggest problem that I see is the way the irrigation systems are set up," says McAfee. "The system is on a clock and set to run three or four times a week. Some commercial properties and apartment buildings and places like that may have systems that come on four, five, maybe six times a week.

"That's way too much water. They don't do a good job of matching the precipitation rate to the soil type so they end up getting runoff in 10 to 15 minutes," says McAfee. "It's real easy to overwater because if the grass is green and you keep it wet, it stays green.

Lack of coverage uniformity is another common problem, even on professionally maintained turfgrass. The reasons are var-

## IRRIGATION HARDWARE PROBLEMS FOR 23 SYSTEMS

PROBLEM	OCCURRENCE
Sunken heads	4 sites
Misaligned heads	14 sites
Broken piping	5 sites
High pressure	2 sites
Mixed spray arcs	5 sites

## OCCURRENCE OF MEAN DISTRIBUTION UNIFORMITY

DU RANGE	OCCURRENCE
31-40%	1 site
41-50%	13 sites
51-60%	7 sites
61-70%	2 sites

RESULTS OF WATER AUDITS CONDUCTED BY DR. JIM MCAFFEE, TURFGRASS EXTENSION TEXAS A&M

ied but they are most often caused by improper placement of sprinkler heads.

"Sometimes people try to save money and space heads too far apart," says McAfee.

Why is irrigation efficiency suddenly so important?

Look at your growing water bills or witness the number of communities suffering severe water shortages. Local governments are implementing stricter and stricter water conservation plans. Almost all of these plans focus on the Green Industry's use of irrigation water.

The people that make the water decisions can see for themselves when water is being wasted by inefficient systems.

"The only true way to figure how long to run your system is to do an audit," advises McAfee. "With auditing, I'm convinced that a majority of property owners could save 50% on their water bills." **LM**