

CALLING ALL CREW MEMBERS

Tips to improve efficiency for fall maintenance

BY CHRISTINE SCHAFFRAN

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When it comes to park maintenance in the fall, some things are as certain as the leaves changing color and the days getting shorter.

Most departments dedicate significant time to rounding up fallen leaves, crushing them, and disposing of them. Tree pruning and planting are fairly routine jobs. Many departments will take a final crack at weeding and look ahead to turning mowers into snow plows and blowers.

But some tasks might not be so common across the country, or there may be a better way to handle those duties that have become second nature. We asked several maintenance personnel to share their trials and tribulations, as well as their tips and tricks on how to make fall maintenance run smoothly and efficiently.





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 Bobcat

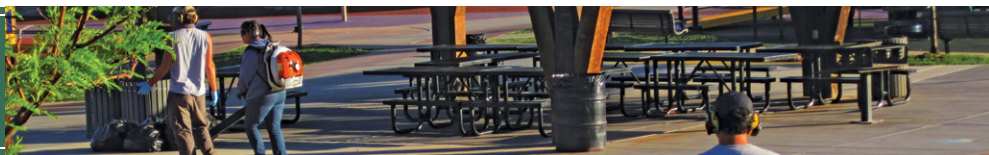
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Catch Up

Whether equipment needs service in-house or is sent out for repair, most departments echo the same sentiment—fall is the time to catch up on projects.

“Our spring and summer are so nuts that we are usually catching up on problem areas that we weren’t able to get to,” says Karen Viera, administrative assistant for the city of Nampa, Idaho. “Unless it’s critical, we store items that are broken until we have a chance to get to it.”

While this is a wise approach to dividing the workload, why not take it a step further and recruit additional hands to help?

Viera explains that while equipment is repaired and inventoried through the winter, any work that can be done by volunteer groups in the spring—such as repainting and repairing picnic tables—is put off until then.

Jesse Felix, superintendent of parks for the West Chicago Park District (Ill.), says volunteers came in handy last year in juggling multiple projects in the fall “off-time.” He says the strategy helps lighten the load on full-time staff members during the more hectic peak times of spring and summer.

“Last fall, for example, we painted the pool and assisted a group of volunteers with installing an 18-hole disc-golf course,” he explains.

Graffiti Removal

Unfortunately, there is always some vandalism and graffiti that require attention—and what better time to clean the scribbling up than in fall before closing down facilities.

Mike Dyszkiewicz, superintendent of the parks and recreation department for the city of South Bend, Ind., advises other departments to shut down restrooms and other facilities before Halloween to avoid further damage.

“I mean, there’s always vandalism, but there seems to be a trend, especially that time of year that we get hit hard just because of the season,” he says.

Dyszkiewicz recommends using a soda-blaster treatment to remove graffiti because the baking-soda solution does not harm the environment or put dangerous chemicals into the ground and surrounding areas.

Southern Saturation

However, not everyone is anticipating the arrival of winter with an arctic blast. In fact, the majority of departments will be fertilizing, aerating, slicing, and mowing well into the fall-foliage months.

“In South Florida, we’re heavy and deep into football season,” explains Cesar Garcia, superintendent of parks for the city of West Park. “Everyone wants to be outdoors all the time, so the hardest part is keeping people off the fields. The fields can only handle so much. People see that the sun is out, but we have to explain it’s been raining for 3-1/2 days.”

Garcia says the “rainy season” brings issues of dry rot that can only be addressed with a proper



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aerating schedule. He adds that insects come with the rain, so eliminating standing water is always a priority. He implores those with parks below sea level to have a plan of attack in maintaining ball fields and other common outdoor gathering areas.

In Mesquite, Texas, Travis Sales, Manager of Park Services, recommends cutting, leveling, and installing new sod and removing the clay buildup that produces a dangerous “lip” that impacts ball roll.

“This is the time to get your irrigation systems inspected, adjusted, and ready for the spring of the next year so that they are functioning properly for the start of the watering season,” he adds.

Winterize

Perhaps the most extensive task on the “to-do” list, winterizing is arguably the most important fall-maintenance procedure.

One of the most common tasks is shutting down restroom facilities and blowing out lines for irrigation systems, pools, and any other water lines that can freeze over the winter.

“I personally hate water-line breaks in the spring,” Felix admits. “All of our buildings and the pool have their water lines blown out with an air compressor. Drain lines, urinals, and toilets are filled with RV

More Advice

“Keep a journal on what worked and what did not work in the summer. I am surprised by how much I refer back to it. Use your journal to organize a list of improvements for next season.”

Jesse Felix,
Superintendent of Parks,
West Chicago Park District (Ill.)

“Review certifications and make sure staff training is available through the winter.”

A. Cory Styron,
Assistant Director of
Parks and Recreation,
City of Round Rock, Texas

“We have been using sonar in one of our ponds that had a significant algae growth during the month of August when there was little to no rain. The sonar appears to be effective at breaking down the cell wall of the chloroplasts in the algae and seems to work very effectively so far with little environmental impact.”

Laura Sarno,
Supervisor of Parks
Maintenance,
Gaithersburg, Md.

“Use a tailgate salt spreader on a dump truck to spread bulk Turface (Calcine Clay) onto a dry infield for pre-season applications. You can set the rate and eliminate doing the work by hand.”

Eric Lacher,
Director of Parks and Properties,
Batavia, Ill.

“We use a ‘quick-freeze’ list of what to do when we briefly dip into freezing temps, to protect vulnerable infrastructure like free-standing water fountains, above-ground backflow preventers for irrigation, and/or restroom facilities. These would be temporary protections frequently employed in the fall as we may have a 28-degree morning followed by a 65-degree afternoon. This would also be something done only before more complete winterization methods later in October and early November. All of this is weather-dependent, and very unpredictable each September/October.”

Bob Burkhardt,
Crew Chief-North District,
Fort Collins, Colo.

“In response to the economic downturn, we have developed a relationship with several local tree companies. When we need wood chips/shredded bark we let the tree company know and they deliver clean shredded bark mulch to locations throughout our park system. This is beneficial to both parties. The tree company saves the cost of dumping the material at the landfill, and we get quality product that doesn’t cost the taxpayers.”

Doug Guild,
Parks Superintendent,
City of Henderson, Nev.

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antifreeze when they are empty of water. Every inlet in the pool has two cups of RV antifreeze poured down it. When it runs back to the surge tank, I know the lines are ready to be capped.”

Among the other tasks to be completed, Bill Rosenberg, director of parks and facilities for the Carol Stream Park District in Illinois, adds to the list:

- ✓ Remove pond aerators
- ✓ Get the sled hill ready and inspected
- ✓ Place markers along paths to be plowed
- ✓ Check and change light timers
- ✓ Bring in most of the trash cans
- ✓ Remove the fabric from sun structures
- ✓ Top-dress sports fields with dirt and seed
- ✓ Bring in picnic tables
- ✓ Mulch playgrounds
- ✓ Have port-a-potties removed
- ✓ Take down the lightning-detection system.

Fall is also a delicate dance with Mother Nature to determine which equipment is needed—the mower or the snow blower. Until the ground freezes and the temperature drops, it is difficult to make the switch to winter gear for good. Bob Burkhardt, crew chief for the North District for the City of Fort Collins Park Division in Colorado, offers a checklist for converting equipment for snow removal:

- ✓ Remove mower decks, and convert them to snow brooms
- ✓ Check snow-plow attachments and prepare for mounting on trucks
- ✓ Prepare utility vehicles for snow-broom attachments
- ✓ Train employees on snow routes and equipment operation.



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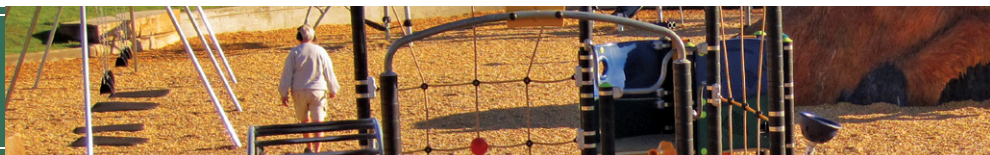
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Seasonal Employee Send-Off

After all that labor, employees deserve a round of applause for their efforts. After reviewing seasonal employees to determine “who performed well and treated the position with respect,” Felix recommends hosting an “Adios Party” to show employees how much their dedication and hard work are appreciated.

And before the last shovelful of snow melts, start thinking about how to get a jump on the spring cleanup. Those departments that have been diligent about keeping a journal and scheduling projects for the upcoming season will have a leg up. **PRB**

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To avoid water-line breaks in the spring, blow out lines with an air compressor in the fall and fill them with RV antifreeze.