



What's Your Score?

GRADING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP WITH FRANK ROSSI, PH.D.

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BMPs - A hot topic and acronym we as turf managers have been hearing much more of lately. Best. Management. Practices. Three words that when strung together encourage us to be mindful in order to protect our natural environment, continue to expand our knowledge, and even manage our finances. These daily practices benefit you and your golf course as a whole, all while specifically monitoring impacts on the sustainability triangle. Environment. Social. Economic.

Dr. Frank Rossi (Associate Professor, Integrated Plant Science at Cornell University) joined us at the 2024 Turfgrass Management Conference - taking the stage with enthusiasm immediately after the OGSA's announcement of the official Ontario Golf Course BMPs document launch in partnership with the GCSAA, made public by Al Schwemler (Retired Superintendent, OGSA Past President & Director) and Kevin Doyle (Field Staff-Northeast Region GCSAA). Rossi congratulated the association for being progressive and linked the two presentations seamlessly.

As explained by Frank, having these documents is (our) way to codify and say to people, "this is our stake in the ground." When we are governed by environmental resources (i.e., water, soils, pollinators, etc.), we want to arrange according to a plan for the things that matter most. He promises, "there are practices in every industry that would eventually pollute something that

would also have regulations against them." This reassures us that we are not alone, even though it seems that golf courses get much of the scrutiny. BMPs is a shared language. It is not unheard of to have these standards, Rossi reiterates. "In this case, they are voluntary environmental programs." Although, in his

"The BMPs for Ontario Golf Courses document can become a vital building block to communicate and elevate your environmentally positive efforts to stakeholders including those in golf, within your community, and the regulatory arena."

- OGSA

experience, he has found that the easiest way to get people to change their ways is to pass a law. "If you pass a law, everyone has to change their behaviour. When educating and asking people to voluntarily change their behaviours, you're up to the parallels of individualism." Which has the possibility to be a challenge in many ways, including convincing those less concerned with where their money is being spent. As long as they are spending it, their budgets are (typically) never minimized.

During the last three years, Rossi and his

team have conducted research in the US and abroad focusing on sustainability practices and key aspects of environmental stewardship that everyone can adopt. Reminding us that the heavy lifting has already been done for us, all we have to do is implement it. In their findings, they came to recognize that public golf courses seem to naturally fit the mold of best management practices due to their staff and budget sizes. It is often the case that they do not have the same high-performance standards as a private club and already use less water, treat fewer areas, and have less (wo)manpower, etc., but there is still room for improvement. Rossi shares that their research has proven that, "if you want true environmental responsibility, don't put as much stuff on as much land. Period... Manage less area as intensely as you can."

Your score comes into play with an approach that, as Rossi explains, has been ratified in the educational process to meet people where they are at. He believes "you all should be shooting par." He, along with his team at Cornell and New York State Pollution Prevention Institute, cultivated a handbook with three general ways that you can get involved and aim for your best score. This handbook was developed to encourage improvement in your approach, practices, solutions, and strategies. Here is how the scoring is set up:

Par: Perfect for the beginner; with low friction and adoption at high rates. Easy to implement, laying the foundation for advancement in your practice of sustainability.

Birdie: The intermediate approach with moderate friction and adoption rates. Taking the time to plan in detail while delivering

bigger results. Bringing your basic (par) practices to the next level.

Eagle: The Best Practices; an advanced program designed to bring your sustainability practices to the top tier with high friction and low adoption rates. Integrating operations based on science and data collection.

Considering the birth of BMPs was to address water pollution and consumption, a simple, yet great example for all three approaches is water usage. A simple Par scoring would remind you to “let nature do the work” and watch for timely rainfalls. Putting for Birdie? Grab a moisture meter and “find your number.” The elusive Eagle prompts us to monitor our evapotranspiration rates to determine our watering needs by “let(ting) data tell the story.”

As the presentation wrapped up, Dr. Rossi touched on point-source pollution and was adamant that not only should we be looking at our golf courses, but we must hone in on our maintenance facilities. It has been said that these sites are the location where the risk of potential pollution and contamination is the highest; a place where we store and handle our chemicals and fertilizers, and

wash our equipment at the end of the day. Rossi asks us to evolve on how we manage our wash pads, as “these point-source issues are the biggest ones we face. What is being rinsed down that drain? Where is that water going? Have you considered these things?” Here are some strategies to give thought to in order to step up your environmental stewardship and achieve those desired scores within your facility pertaining to your water usage:

- Use as little water as possible - research shows that if equipment is blown off, away from your wash pad, water usage is cut by 50% (**Par**)
- Install a low-flow nozzle to your hose - cutting water usage another 50%, if used in conjunction with compressed air (**Birdie**)
- Install a water flow meter - collecting data on how much water is actually being used (**Birdie**)
- Get involved in a water recycling system - site specific and engineered based off water usage data (**Eagle**)

We continue to be at the forefront of information and research and its findings

within the industry. A big thanks to Dr. Frank Rossi for allocating his passion and research for all of us to utilize as well as implement. It really is our time to take the stand; showing up for mother nature, the future of golf, and how we as turf managers can make an impact, sustainably.

For more information and a copy of the Golf Course Sustainability Handbook visit www.rit.edu/affiliate/nysp2i/golf. Stay tuned for Dr. Rossi’s next collaboration of a Washpad Guidance Handbook - available in the next three months.

Don’t forget to head over to www.ogsa.ca/bmp to view and utilize the Ontario Golf Course BMPs document today! This is where you will also find a link to the GCSAA site to build your own site specific BMP catalog. ■

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