

[Home](#) > [Issue by Date](#) > **June 2007**

Site Maintenance

Landscape management is essential for operational efficiencies and positive results.

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A

successful and comprehensive site maintenance program is one that not only takes into consideration the seasonal needs of a landscape (mowing, pruning, leaf removal, shoveling, etc.), but also considers site use patterns and the evolution of the landscape itself over time.

User Needs

When it comes to exterior maintenance, there are many tasks that are site specific based on user



In this space which is part of Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, WA, the new landform crosses the highway and train tracks and descends to meet the water's edge. Charles Anderson was the landscape architect on the project. (Photo: Paul Warchol.)

needs. For example, university campuses, retail facilities, and office complexes are three very different facility types with specific patterns that dictate response. All three have intense periods of use and high expectation, and management of the site could play a crucial role in an important event or commercial season.

At school. At an academic campus, facilities managers should consider the need to move students safely from classroom to dormitory to dining hall. There are also the needs of the parents who assist in move-in/out and attend graduation. Finally, there are the alumni and outside guests who visit during special sporting and fundraising events.

Passageways between dorms, classrooms, quads, and other buildings and spaces need to be maintained with open sightlines and ample lighting. Plantings must look colorful and lush during the school year and important weekend events. Areas of congregation and passageway often need to be repaired at the end of the school year or following a big event, and the short June to September construction season must be abided.

In stores. In retail facilities, important priorities include safe passage between parking lots and retail shops and ample parking spaces during peak holidays and on weekends. In many regions, the holiday shopping season corresponds with snowstorms, making the balance between snow removal and storage and peak parking demands an important consideration.

Plantings must be attractive year-round and able to withstand high levels of radiation from asphalt and buildings. Facilities managers need to consider irrigation, pruning, deadheading, and/or replanting of seasonal greenery to assure constant color and improve marketing. In northern climates, roadways and sidewalks should be kept safe and clear of cracks, heaving, and snow and ice to prevent hazards and liability. Litter control is always a concern.

At work. Office complexes, corporate parks, and government campuses offer a third set of user needs that reflect a nine-to-five workday. Facilities managers need to ensure safe and efficient passage into and out of the complex during rush hours, along passageways, between parking lots, and to or from public transportation sites.

Areas where employees enjoy lunches and coffee breaks should look their best, and the facility needs to be secure after hours. If the office hosts many outside visitors, main entries need to be inviting and marketable as well. Because of the traffic patterns created by workers, many maintenance tasks are best performed early in the morning or on weekends.

The Evolving Landscape

Just as furnaces, roofs, and appliances have a useful life, so do many trees, shrubs, lighting fixtures, and other hardscape features. Managers should know where the landscape is in its useful life in order to understand and care for it appropriately.

In the young landscape, it is often imperative to ameliorate post-construction soil compaction so newly planted seedlings have a chance to mature and thrive. Irrigation systems need to be monitored closely. Newly planted hillsides must be protected from erosion, and storm drains must be checked to avoid puddling and turf damage.

It's important to remove tree stakes and guys after the first season, so plants can adapt to wind patterns, and cables don't girdle growing branches. Meanwhile, the cycle of annual maintenance must begin as soon as plants are established.

Mature landscapes have their own set of maintenance requirements that include rejuvenation pruning and other tasks that keep them thriving. Moreover, use patterns and cycles change over time, just as plants age

and their context alters. A mature landscape will bear traces of earlier uses and intentions and will adapt to new ones with varying degrees of ease.

The Long-Term

Pruning is an example of a task that too often gets treated like a matter of short-term care when it should be regarded with long-term importance. Facilities managers should assess trees and shrubs for their intended function and prune plants early to assure proper growth habits.

Pruning branches back to outward pointing buds ensures canopies and shrubs do not become too dense and shade out inner portions. Periodic scouting for pests and diseases may reduce or eliminate infection.

Pedestrian routes are an example of a use pattern that should be assessed periodically to address potential soil compaction. Solutions include aeration or the introduction of new walkways or barriers to divert foot traffic away from mature trees and shrubs whose eventual decline might only appear long after the damage is done.

Other botanical maintenance tasks should continue: mulching, fertilization, mowing and other turfgrass treatments, pruning, scouting for pests and disease, and so on. However, since established plants require less irrigation and fertilization, it's important to cut back irrigation to plant beds (not turf areas) and top dressing with compost instead of chemical fertilizers.

Pruning remains of utmost importance. In mature plantings, it may be necessary to cut back vigorous shrubs aggressively (called rejuvenation pruning) to promote new, healthier waves of growth.

Of course few landscapes are either mature or young. Most all will have elements of both. As previously stated, the importance of record keeping and maintenance logs is critical to the judicious delegation of time and resources to the care of the landscape at every stage.

Surrounding Environs

While much attention is obviously given to plant care and the importance of a well performing landscape, the same holds true for the proper care and performance of the hardscape. In fact, the relationship is often a close one, as seen in the case of pedestrian patterns or with unaddressed utility/sidewalk/tree root competition that can cause drainage problems and material failure. Heaving sidewalks, cracked paving, puddling, and icing are all liabilities that compromise not only safe passage, but also influence the success of the facility to deliver its intended use.

The final outcome of any maintenance plan should always be the same: a healthy landscape. Designers want to see their plans age gracefully, facilities managers want operations to run smoothly, and owners want to see their clients happy. The value of a landscape appreciates over time (unlike their static building counterparts, which tend to depreciate). With a comprehensive understanding and treatment of landscape elements and plantings, facility managers can maintain the value of the site and help it achieve that appreciation.

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How comprehensive is your landscaping maintenance plan? Share your experiences by sending an e-mail to schwartz@groupe.com.

Bird Control Measures Improve An Exterior Maintenance Program

By **Mona Zemsky**

As facility managers plan for typical seasonal exterior maintenance tasks, many are forced to consider a seemingly innocuous component—birds. Yes, bird droppings are no minor matter.

A flock of birds can render a location unwalkable by humans. Not only do the droppings make for an unpleasant environment, they pose a slip and fall hazard and can be a breeding ground for bacteria and disease.

There is also the matter of cost. Acidic droppings can shorten the life of buildings and grounds. And for facilities plagued by recurring bird problems, maintenance personnel may spend large amounts of time and money cleaning the mess and creating a safe environment. In fact, OSHA and other regulatory entities can cite, fine, or shut down companies (particularly in the food preparation industry) for bird mess problems.

It is possible to rid facilities of pesky birds without resorting to lethal methods that may be considered unacceptable by members of the employee population or local community. A successful plan will make the area undesirable and unappealing (via sound, visual, or physical methods) to stubborn birds while maintaining an important degree of environmental sensitivity.

If a bird problem is especially severe or has been untreated for years, a combination of methods will teach the birds that the facility is no longer fun, relaxing, or inviting. Three possible methods include sound deterrents, visual devices, and physical barriers.

It is always easier to keep birds from roosting at the beginning of a season than to rout them out once they've established a living pattern. For this reason, later winter is a great time to have "bird check" on the facility maintenance schedule. The solution will be cheaper and faster if the facilities team begins bird-proofing then.

However, facility managers just getting a start on the issue now will also benefit. First, the control plan will be established early for next year, and there is still time to perfect it. Second, there is a good deal to be said for testing a plan during the most challenging time. It will be easy to see what works, so the plan can be adjusted for even greater results next spring.

As with most plans, success takes time to build. Facility managers shouldn't expect perfection immediately, but they should keep at it and establish zero tolerance towards stubborn birds. Rewards for the facility will be realized in terms of saved time and money, decreased liability and disease risk, and improved and beautified sites.



Zemsky is a veteran of the bird control industry and has been cited as an expert on the subject on dozens of occasions in both the print and broadcast media. She has submitted this article on behalf of Bird-X, Inc. (www.bird-x.com).



Photo: Bird-X, Inc.

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