Mowing

BMP Type			
Design			
Installation			
Maintenance/Operations			X
Green Industry Relevance			
ASLA		GCC	X
ALCC	X	ISA	
CALCP	X	RMSGA	X
CNGA		GCSAA	X

Description

Mow lawns to the proper height and at the proper frequency to maintain turfgrass health, thereby minimizing the need for pesticide and fertilizer application and reducing water usage.

Basic Practice Guidelines

1. Mow the lawn frequently enough so that no more than one-third of the grass blade is removed during a single mowing. For example, if maintaining the grass at a height of 2½ inches, cut the grass by the time it reaches 3¾ inches tall. This requires changing the mowing schedule to reflect how quickly the grass grows. This can range from four to ten days between mowing.

Proper mowing, irrigation and maintenance of turfgrass results in deeper, more drought resistant root systems.

Source: International Turf Producers Foundation.

2. Grass undergoes less stress when the amount of blade left on the plant can still function efficiently. The preferred height of Colorado turfgrass species such as Kentucky bluegrass and long fescue is 2½ to 3 inches. The minimum height is 2 inches. Mowing grass to a height of less than 2 inches can reduce drought and heat tolerance, and cause a higher incidence of insect, disease and weed pest problems. “Scalping” is never recommended. Lawns with little foot traffic can be mowed as high as 4 inches during the hottest months.

3. Leaving clippings on the lawn can be beneficial to the plants and save mowing time. Clippings break down quickly, which allows nitrogen and other nutrients to be recycled. Clippings can also encourage the growth of beneficial soil microorganisms. Studies show

that it takes less time to mow more often and leave clippings on the lawn than to mow less often and catch and bag clippings for disposal.

4. Keep grass clippings and leaves off of streets and out of gutters. Using a mulching lawn mower to keep lawn clippings on the lawn is especially useful. Do not use a power blower to blow clippings into the gutter.

5. Keep grass extra-long during the hot summer months to reduce water needs. Remember to decrease irrigation when implementing this practice.

6. Mowing equipment should be well maintained. Sharpen blades several times per season. Shredded or white tips of grass blades are an indication of a dull or damaged mower blade that needs sharpening. Use the operating and service instruction manual provided with the mower, and consistently perform the suggested maintenance. A competent service person should thoroughly inspect the mower on a regular basis in accordance with manufacturer specifications.

7. Mowing after (but not during) the hottest period of the day, watering the lawn following mowing, and allowing the lawn to be dry for a day or two prior to mowing are all actions that help to reduce lawn stress. Mowing results are best when the lawn is dry, but not stressed.

Regional or Industry Considerations/Adaptations

1. Mowing can be an effective practice for weed control in unmanicured areas.

2. For commercial lawn care maintenance companies, proper mowing can usually be accommodated on the typical 7-10 day schedule, provided that the site is not over-fertilized or over-irrigated.

Key References

Associated Landscape Contractors of America. 2003. *Landscape Maintenance Training*. Herndon, VA: ALCA. *(As of 2008, offered by Professional Land Care Network [PLANET].)*

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