



Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program Overview

Program Background

The turfgrass industry in Michigan is composed of golf course, lawn care, grounds maintenance, and sod production operations and the various suppliers of turf products and equipment. The industry has grown considerably over the last two decades and in 1995 the Status and Potential of Michigan Agriculture reported annual sales of nearly one billion dollars. While all segments of the industry are strong, the golf segment has demonstrated remarkable success in the last ten years. There are approximately 865 golf courses in Michigan, which ranks our state among the leaders nationally in total number of golf courses per state and number of golf courses per capita.

Within the golf industry, environmental sensitivity has long been recognized as a key to the future of the sport. During the last decade, the philosophy of golf course design and construction has changed. Architects have moved toward working with the existing landscape to preserve the natural features rather than making stark changes to the land. This philosophy of environmental sensitivity is particularly evident in Michigan. Many courses have focused on the environmental resources of their properties and have taken measures to protect them from negative impact. In recent years, significant contributions have been made in environmentally based research to investigate the impact of turf maintenance and it has provided a basis for enhancing the environmental sensitivity of golf course operations.

In order for Michigan's golf course industry to continue to prosper in the future, it is important to elevate the environmental stewardship of the golf industry and provide recognition for those accomplishments to the public. The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program is collaborating with industry, university, governmental agencies, and environmental advocacy groups to make fundamental advances toward environmental protection and the future economic well being of the golf course industry.

Program Purpose

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program is intended to organize efforts of the turfgrass industry, state agencies, Michigan State University (MSU), and environmental advocacy groups to advance the environmental stewardship of the turfgrass industry and to recognize environmental achievements. The program was developed at MSU with support from the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Golf Association of Michigan. Over the past twelve years, the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program has provided the base funding to develop the program.

Mission

The mission of the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program is:

- To advance the environmental stewardship of Michigan's golf industry by increasing the awareness and understanding of Michigan's environmental resources, the potential impacts of golf turf management, and elevate the level of pollution protection;
- To enhance fish and wildlife habitat, indigenous vegetation, and protect water resources with buffer zones on golf course properties;
- To clearly identify environmental laws and regulations and advance the compliance of the golf turf industry;
- To engage the golf industry, regulatory agencies, MSU, and environmental citizen groups in productive communication; and
- To recognize, promote, and award environmental stewardship achievements.

The mission of the program will be achieved through a series of educational workshops, self-assessment exercises and implementation of environmental action plans. As part of a participant's commitment to environmental stewardship, they will sign a statement supporting the Mission and the following Principles of the program.

Program Principles

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program Principles are to:

- Promote and communicate best management practices to control potential sources of pollution;
- Comply with environmental laws and regulations, adopt pollution prevention practices, and reduce waste;
- Minimize inputs to the environment;
- Commit to the protection of the natural resources on the property; and
- Protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and native vegetation.

Pollution Prevention and Property Enhancement

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program consists of self-evaluation modules that can be used to identify, assess and eliminate potential detrimental environmental impacts on your property. The materials are designed to clearly identify environmental laws and regulations impacting the turfgrass industry and promote compliance with those laws and regulations. It is also designed to promote pollution prevention strategies and to recognize environmentally sound management practices. The program includes sections dedicated to promoting fish and wildlife habitat, indigenous vegetation, and water quality protection.

The modules include:

- Site Evaluation
- Wellhead Protection
- Fuel Storage
- Pesticide Handling/Application
- Pesticide and Fertilizer Storage
- Pesticide Mixing and Loading
- Equipment Wash Pad
- Emergency Response
- Irrigation Use and Conservation
- Buffer Zones
- Green Purchasing, energy conservation, waste reduction

Getting on the Road to Certification

Step One:

The first step in the program is to complete the Site Evaluation and Natural Resource Inventory Module. This module examines the natural resources on your property and helps you identify aspects of the turf management operation that may have the potential to impact these resources. An evaluation of the current level of protection for groundwater, surface water and soil will be made by examining the location and condition of a number of items on your property including pesticide, fertilizer and fuel storage areas, mixing and loading areas, equipment washing areas, the septic system, well and compost areas. Customizing an overhead map of your property by locating, delineating and identifying important features completes the first exercise in the site evaluation.

Step Two:

The golf turf manager requests a site visit from the Stewardship staff. During the site visit, materials from the program modules are reviewed and a three-year environmental action plan is developed. The golf property is then recognized as a Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program Member. Courses that: (1) are in compliance with the major rules and regulations outlined in the program modules, (2) have no direct point source discharges to water resources and (3) have appropriate well protection, are eligible to receive certification in the program.

Step Three:

Promote your achievements by including your accomplishments in marketing materials. The MTESP staff will work with you to help get the word out.

Program Fees and Membership

As of October 1, 2008 golf courses will no longer be charged an annual membership fee to participate in the program. Starting in 2009, courses will be considered members of MTESP if they maintain certified status or if they have had a site visit in the last three years. This should allow for an increase in the number of courses that can informally participate in the program while maintaining a distinction for properties that are actively pursuing certification.

Site Visit Fee

The site visit fee is \$500. During the half-day site visit a trained stewardship officer will help assess the level of environmental compliance on your property. After the visit, a customized Environmental Action Plan will be developed that lays out the steps necessary to achieve certification. Once filed, EAPs are valid for three years. Completion of all the required elements of the EAP is necessary in order to apply for certification. The certification visit is \$600. To maintain certification courses must have a visit once every three years.

Program Participation

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program was launched in June 1998. As of January 1, 2009, there have been 247 golf courses that have participated in the program. One hundred and twenty eight of these courses have completed a one-on-one site visit and 64 have been certified in the program. These courses are making improvements to protect and enhance the environment that often go beyond what is required by law. The three-year Environmental Action Plan that is developed during a site visit has been found to be an extremely valuable long-term management tool. It has been used to communicate concerns, solve problems, and celebrate successes with management, course owners, club members and government officials.

For More Information

For more information on any aspect of the program please visit www.mtesp.org or call the office at 517-355-0271 x 1145.

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