

# Chapter 3: Grounds Staffing Guidelines

by Robert A. Getz

Providing guidelines for calculating the staffing requirements for a particular grounds area is based on two essential factors. First is the type of area that must be maintained and the tasks associated with that maintenance. Second is the amount of care to be provided, or the level of attention to be paid, to the grounds area. This chapter presents a series of matrices that integrate these two factors, facilitating determination of the staffing requirements for a particular type of grounds area. The Levels of Attention are described first, followed by matrices presenting tasks for grounds areas ranging from flower beds to football fields.

These matrices are designed to illustrate that each maintenance task may be accomplished with greater or lesser levels of attention. Higher levels of attention will require more staffing. The matrices are the building blocks of the grounds staffing guidelines. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of how the matrices can be used to determine required staffing levels.

## Levels of Attention

The Level of Attention is the amount of time dedicated to a maintenance task. The following six sections detail what is expected at each Level of Attention. These levels were developed in part from the National Recreation and Park Association's *Park Maintenance Standards*, in which they are referred to as "Modes." They provide a word picture of what one would expect to see when encountering each of the types of spaces. The first level is one of very high expectations. It is reserved for a special, high-visibility area that requires maintenance levels beyond the norm. Level 2 is the norm one expects to see on a regular, recurring basis. This Level of Attention is the standard desired.

Levels 3 and 4 are lower than the norm and result from insufficient staff. For whatever reason, sufficient staff is not available to accomplish the care and maintenance required for the landscaped material and the standard (Level 2) is not maintained. Level 5 is one step before the land is allowed to return to its original state. Level 6 is the point at which the land is allowed to return to its natural state.

**LEVEL 1.** *State-of-the-art maintenance applied to a high-quality diverse landscape. Associated with high-traffic urban areas, such as public squares, malls, government grounds, or college/university campuses.*

**TURF CARE.** Grass height maintained according to species and variety of grass. Mowed at least once every five working days but may be as often as once every three working days. Aeration as required but not less than four times per year. Reseeding or sodding as needed. Weed control to be practiced so that no more than 1 percent of the surface has weeds present.

**FERTILIZER.** Adequate fertilization applied to plant species according to their optimum requirements. Application rates and times should ensure an even supply of nutrients for the entire year. Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium percentages should follow local recommendations. Trees, shrubs, and flowers should be fertilized according to their individual requirements of nutrients for optimum growth. Unusually long or short growing seasons may *modify* the chart slightly.

**IRRIGATION.** Sprinkler irrigated-electric automatic commonly used. Some manual systems could be considered adequate under plentiful rainfall circumstances and with adequate staffing. Frequency of use follows rainfall, temperature, season length, and demands of plant material.

**LITTER CONTROL.** Minimum of once per day, seven days per week. Extremely high visitation may increase the frequency. Receptacles should be plentiful enough to hold all trash usually generated between servicing without overflowing.

**PRUNING.** Frequency dictated primarily by species and variety of trees and shrubs. Length of growing season and design concept also a controlling factor-i.e., clipped vs. natural-style hedges. Timing scheduled to coincide with low demand periods or to take advantage of special growing characteristics.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** At this maintenance level, the controlling objective is to avoid public awareness of any problems. It is anticipated at Level 1 that problems will either be prevented or observed at a very early stage and corrected immediately.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Snow removal starts the same day that accumulations of .5 inch are present. At no time will now be permitted to cover transportation or parking surfaces longer than noon of the day after the snow stops. Application of snow-melting compound and/or gravel is appropriate to reduce the danger of injury due to falls.

**SURFACES.** Sweeping, cleaning, and washing of surfaces should be done so that at no time does an accumulation of sand, dirt, or leaves distract from the looks or safety of the area.

**REPAIRS.** Repairs to all elements of the design should be done immediately when problems are discovered, provided replacement parts and technicians are available to accomplish the job. When disruption to the public might be major and the repair is not critical, repairs may be postponed to a time period that is least disruptive.

**INSPECTIONS.** A staff member should conduct inspection daily.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** Normally, extensive or unusual floral plantings are part of the design. These may include ground-level beds, planters, or hanging baskets. Often, multiple plantings are scheduled, usually for at least two blooming cycles per year. Some designs may call for a more frequent rotation of bloom. Maximum care, including watering, fertilizing, disease control, disbudding, and weeding, is necessary. Weeding flowers and shrubs is done a minimum of once per week. The desired standard is essentially weeded free.

**LEVEL 2 High-level maintenance. Associated with well-developed public areas, malls, government grounds, or college/university campuses. Recommended level for most organizations.**

**TURF CARE.** Grass cut once every five working days. Aeration as required but not less than two times per year. Reseeding or sodding when bare spots are present. Weed control practiced when weeds present a visible problem or when weeds represent 5 percent of the turf surface. Some pre-emergent products may be used at this level.

**FERTILIZER.** Adequate fertilizer level to ensure that all plant materials are healthy and growing vigorously. Amounts depend on species, length of growing season, soils, and rainfall. Rates should correspond to at least the lowest recommended rates. Distribution should ensure an even supply of nutrients for the entire year. Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium percentages should follow local recommendations. Trees, shrubs, and flowers should receive fertilizer levels to ensure optimum growth.

**IRRIGATION.** Sprinkler irrigated--electric automatic commonly used. Some manual systems could be considered adequate under plentiful rainfall circumstances and with adequate staffing. Frequency of use follows rainfall, temperature, season length, and demands of plant material.

**LITTER CONTROL.** Minimum of once per day, five days per week. Offsite movement of trash depends on size of containers and use by the public. High use may dictate daily or more frequent leaning.

**PRUNING.** Usually done at least once per season unless species planted dictate more frequent attention. Sculpted hedges or high-growth species may dictate a more frequent requirement than most trees and shrubs in natural-growth plantings.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** Usually done when disease or insects are inflicting noticeable damage, are reducing vigor of plant material, or could be considered a bother to the public. Some preventive measures may be used, such as systemic chemical treatments. Cultural prevention of disease problems can reduce time spent in this category. Some minor problems may be tolerated at this level.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Snow removed by noon the day following snowfall. Gravel or snowmelt may be used to reduce ice accumulation.

**SURFACES.** Should be cleaned, repaired, repainted, or replaced when their appearances have noticeably deteriorated.

**REPAIRS.** Should be done whenever safety, function, or appearance is in question.

**INSPECTIONS.** Inspection should be conducted by some staff member at least once a day when regular staff is scheduled.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** Normally, no more complex than two rotations of bloom per year. Care cycle is usually at least once per week, but watering may be more frequent. Health and vigor dictate cycle of fertilization and disease control. Beds essentially kept weed free.

**LEVEL 3. Moderate-level maintenance. Associated with locations that have Moderate to low levels of development or visitation, or with operations that, because of budget restrictions, cannot afford a higher level of maintenance.**

**TURF CARE.** Grass cut once every ten working days. Normally not aerated unless turf quality indicates a need or in anticipation of an application of fertilizer. Reseeding or resodding done only when major bare spots appear. Weed control measures normally used when 50 percent of small areas are weed infested or when 15 percent of the general turf is infested with weeds.

**FERTILIZER.** Applied only when turf vigor seems to be low. Low-level application done once per year. Rate suggested is one-half the level recommended.

**IRRIGATION.** Dependent on climate. Locations that receive more than 25 inches of rainfall a year usually rely on natural rainfall with the possible addition of portable irrigation during periods of drought. Dry climates that receive less than 25 inches of rainfall usually have some form of supplemental irrigation. When irrigation is automatic, a demand schedule is programmed. Where manual servicing is required, the norm would be two to three times per week.

**LITTER CONTROL.** Minimum service of two to three times per week. High use may dictate higher levels during the warm season.

**PRUNING.** When required for health or reasonable appearance. With most tree and shrub species, pruning would be performed once every two to three years.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** Done only to address epidemics or serious complaints. Control measures may be put into effect when the health or survival of the plant material is threatened or when public comfort is an issue.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Snow removal done based on local law requirements but generally accomplished by the day following snowfall. Some crosswalks or surfaces may not be cleared at all.

**SURFACES.** Cleaned on a complaint basis. Repaired or replaced as budget allows.

**REPAIRS.** Should be done whenever safety or function is in question.

**INSPECTIONS.** Inspections are conducted once per week.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** Only perennials or flowering trees or shrubs.

**LEVEL 4.** *Moderately low-level maintenance. Associated with locations affected by budget restrictions that cannot afford a high level of maintenance.*

**TURF CARE.** Low-frequency mowing scheduled based on species. Low growing grasses may not be mowed. High grasses may receive periodic mowing. Weed control limited to legal requirements for noxious weeds.

**FERTILIZER.** Not fertilized.

**IRRIGATION.** No irrigation.

**LITTER CONTROL.** Once per week or less. Complaints may increase level above one servicing.

**PRUNING.** No regular trimming. Safety or damage from weather may dictate actual work schedule.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** None except where the problem is epidemic and the epidemic condition threatens resources or the public.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Snow removal done based on local law requirements but generally accomplished by the day following snowfall. Some crosswalks or surfaces may not be cleared at all.

**SURFACES.** Replaced or repaired when safety is a concern and when budget is available.

**REPAIRS.** Should be done whenever safety or function is in question.

**INSPECTIONS.** Inspections are conducted once per month.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** None. May have wildflowers, perennials, flowering trees, or shrubs in place.

**LEVEL 5.** *Minimum-level maintenance. Associated with locations that have severe budget restrictions.*

**TURF CARE.** Low-frequency mowing scheduled based on species. Low growing grasses may not be mowed. High grasses may receive periodic mowing. Weed control limited to legal requirements for noxious weeds.

**FERTILIZER.** Not fertilized.

**IRRIGATION.** No irrigation.

**LITTER CONTROL.** On demand or complaint basis.

**PRUNING.** No pruning unless safety is involved.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** No control except in epidemic or safety situations.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Snow removal done based on local law requirements but generally accomplished by the day following snowfall. Some crosswalks or surfaces may not be cleared at all.

**SURFACES.** Serviced only when safety is a consideration.

**REPAIRS.** Should be done whenever safety or function is in question. **INSPECTIONS.**

Inspections are conducted once per month.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** None. May have wildflowers, perennials, flowering trees, or shrubs in place.

**LEVEL 6.** [Not included in our matrices]

*Natural area that is not developed.*

**TURF CARE.** Not mowed. Weed control only if legal requirements demand.

**FERTILIZER.** Not fertilized. **IRRIGATION.** No irrigation. **LITTER CONTROL.** On demand or complaint basis.

**PRUNING.** No pruning unless safety is involved.

**DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL.** No control except in epidemic or safety situations.

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Only as necessary.

**SURFACES.** Serviced only when safety is a consideration.

**REPAIRS.** Should be done whenever safety or function is in question.

**INSPECTIONS.** Inspections are conducted once per month.

**FLORAL PLANTINGS.** None.