Maine School IPM Fact Sheet

Turf Irrigation

The amount of water needed for healthy and productive turf varies according to the amount and type of field use. **High-use athletic fields need 1.0" of water per week** during the growing season from either rainfall or irrigation. Less water is needed in spring and fall and sometimes slightly more is needed in summer, depending on turf condition and use. Below are some irrigation guidelines.

- All athletic fields used for fall sports benefit from late summer irrigation during a drought period. This irrigation reduces the need for chemical inputs.
- Many factors influence the exact amount needed per week
    - Kentucky Bluegrass needs more water than Fescues
    - Clay soils hold more moisture and hold it longer than sandy soils.
    - Turf with southern exposure uses more water than that with a northern exposure
    - Areas with full sun use more water than areas with partial shade conditions
    - Low humidity, high temperatures and sunshine lead to greater water use

Turf Irrigation Techniques

- Calibrate irrigation system output
- Match irrigation rate to the infiltration rate of the soil
- Irrigate infrequently and deeply (2 - 3 times per week)
- For best efficiency and to reduce disease potential, irrigate in the early morning hours

Pitfalls of Excess Irrigation

- Wet turf is weaker and more easily damaged by traffic or play
- Wet soil compacts and reduces potential for optimum growth
- Water and air must be balanced in the soil; excess water suffocates roots
- Excess water leaches nutrients out of the root zone and contaminates groundwater
- Wet turf is more susceptible to fungal diseases