

Managing Equipment Damage at PROscape

All lawn and landscape maintenance companies make a large investment in equipment to take care of their clients' properties. At PROscape, Orlando, Fla., we're no different, and as we've grown to the \$10-million mark with a number of large commercial accounts and homeowners' associations, our investment in equipment – especially hand-held machines – has grown substantially.

At PROscape, we have five- and six-person crews to manage our accounts. With equipment moving through so many employees' hands, we knew damage to our equipment would be inevitable. However, as we took on more accounts and hired more employees, we also noticed an increase in the beating our equipment was taking and also a rise in hand-held machines going missing either through theft or forgetfulness. Moreover, we found that crews

were replacing edger blades before the existing blades were worn out, which increased our costs for maintenance and parts.

In late 2004, our PROscape operations staff made an effort to eliminate those costs by keeping better track of equipment and its maintenance. Our first step was to make sure crews were going out with enough of the right equipment to complete their jobs. To simplify this, we constructed wheeled equipment racks for each of our crews. The racks are about 6 feet tall and 3 feet wide, with places on both sides to hang items such as edgers, weed eaters and trimmers, as well as a flat base where blowers are stored.

Each evening, our night mechanic ensures that each crew's rack has the equipment they'll need for the next day. In the morning, crew leaders arrive at the shop and go over a checklist with

5 Steps to Controlling Equipment Loss

1. **Develop a rack or designate a place to store the equipment each crew will need for the upcoming day's work. Ensure that equipment is always returned to these areas unless it is on a job or being worked on in the shop.**
2. **Identify a chain of responsibility that involves crewmembers and equipment maintenance specialists. Ensure that all employees use equipment properly in order to avoid damage and create systems to account for each piece.**
3. **Keep a record of the type and condition of the equipment that crews leave with in the morning. Have a responsible crewmember and mechanic or manager sign the log at check-out and check-in.**
4. **Track equipment logs to determine if equipment stays in better condition longer, and to identify the associated cost savings to the company.**
5. **Use older equipment as back-ups, rather than purchasing additional machines.**



At left: Orlando, Fla.-based PROscape designed racks to store each crews' equipment and have seen a tremendous reduction in equipment loss. (Photo: PROscape)

Below: A simple equipment sign-out log helps PROscape track the type and condition of machines used by each crew on a daily basis.

Equipment Sign Out Log

Truck # _____ Forman _____ Date _____

Equipment type	Quantity	Color	Out	In	Comments
Blower(s)					
Weed Eater(s)					
Edger(s)					
Shrub Trimmer					
Ex Shrub trimmer					
Ladder					
Other					

Mower(s)	Number	Condition on sign out	Condition at check in
Mower 1			
Mower 2			
Mower 3			

Sign out
I acknowledge and accept the responsibility for the above equipment
Signature _____ Sup/ mechanic int. _____

Check In
I have returned the above equipment in the same condition it was given to me.
Signature _____ Sup/ mechanic int. _____

Comments:

the mechanic, signing out each piece of equipment for the day. Using an "Equipment Sign-Out Log" the mechanic notes the quantity and color of each type of hand-held equipment being signed out, as well as the number and condition of any mowers the crew takes for the day. The crew leader signs the form and the mechanic initials it, signifying that both employees are clear on how the crew is stocked for the day.

After sign out, the crew leader can wheel the entire equipment rack out to his or her vehicle for loading. Keeping each crew's equipment on the racks between the shop and the maintenance yard ensures that no equipment is left behind, saving the hassle and extra drive time of delivering forgotten machines to a jobsite.

When our crews return at the end of the day, the same equipment

check process happens in reverse. Crew leaders re-load equipment onto their respective racks, meet with the mechanic on duty and go through the checklist again to note that all equipment is returned to the shop in the same condition. This step has helped PROscape reduce the amount of misplaced and damaged equipment significantly. We've created a new level of accountability across our organizations, much of which is on the crew leaders' shoulders. The crew leaders are responsible for ensuring that their crews operate the equipment correctly on the job sites so as to avoid damage and also must answer to the mechanics if machines go missing or sustain more than normal wear and tear. (We've found that if our crews have to answer to the person who has to fix damaged equipment, more machines come back in good working

order.) Once again, the crew leader and mechanic both sign or initial the equipment log at check-in, so our documentation is consistent.

While there was an initial investment in developing and building the equipment racks, the implementation of the rack system has saved the company thousands of dollars. In the summer of 2004 we found we had to buy six or seven pieces of hand-held equipment to replace misplaced or damaged machines. In 2005, we didn't have to buy any. This has easily saved us \$3,000 to \$4,000, and we can continue to use older machines as back-ups because they're still in usable condition. As we continue to save money in this aspect of our business, it will allow us to focus those funds on growing our business and improving PROscape's bottom line.

— David Kohler LL