



## Make the Best of Winter

### TIPS FOR MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS DURING THE OFF-SEASON

“Make hay while the sun shines” is an old saying whose focus on generating maximum revenue during times of good weather remains very appropriate to the modern amusement park and attractions industry. But a second truism is just as applicable: “Good fortune is simply preparation meeting opportunity.”

A good season is built upon a number of factors, not the least of which is the vast amount of preparation that goes into the winterization and planning that facilities implement during each off-season.

As every operator knows, preparing for and utilizing the annual off-season period is as busy a process as the operating season, if not more so.

“The truth is that the winter or off-season is and should be busier than the regular season,” says Harold Hudson, president of industry consultant AAPRA Associates in Southlake, Texas, and former Six Flags vice president of engineering.

To ensure your off-season is as effective and efficient as possible, here are some useful tips and resources for preparing your physical facility and operations programs for the upcoming year.

## Top Ten Tips

1) Conduct a complete facility inspection at least once a month during the off-season to ensure nothing is getting away from you and needs to be added to your existing service list.

2) An off-season rehab schedule should consider these four key factors, according to AAPRA’s Hudson:

- needs analysis
- inside/outside staff allocation and work schedule
- parts and material procurement
- monitoring, expediting, and quality control of the work conducted

Also be sure to develop adequate outdoor and indoor project lists to make the best use of time no matter the weather.

3) “We cover all park signs with Visqueen poly sheeting and then tape or wrap them securely,” says Shipwreck Island’s Wilkes, “which allows us to get several years of usage rather than having to replace them more often.”

4) Don’t overlook or skim on the simple, curbside aspects of your facility, like painting. “You always want your product to look the best because it sells better when it does,” notes Jerry Aldrich, president of Amusement Industry Consulting in Orlando, Florida, and former director of maintenance at Walt Disney World.

5) “Detailed organization is crucial when it comes to winterizing,” states Ben Jones, IAAPA’s FEC specialist and president of Rochester Hills, Michigan-based RECreation & Entertainment Consultants (REC). “Develop pre-closing, closing, and post-closing checklists. Outline maintenance procedures in an easy step-by-step format, and post diagrammed inventories in every building and storage area.”

6) Even for those facilities with weekend or seasonal operations in the autumn, this time of year is the best opportunity to get a jump on outdoor mechanical, repair, and painting work, as the weather tends to be much more predictable in the fall than in the spring.

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## Top Ten Tips (continued)

7) For waterparks, in addition to such fundamental steps as necessary draining of water areas, blowing out lines and filling with antifreeze, emptying filters, and covering drains, Jason Bastien of Water Country in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has three detailed winterization practices that may prove helpful:

- Over the years, the park has assembled specific directions they use as a guide to winterizing the pools. These directions literally go step-by-step, valve by valve, and include pool diagrams with labeled drains, skimmers, returns, etc. Within the documents, operators also try to identify any peculiarities of the attractions that may require special attention. They've found them to be quite useful, and the processes saved considerable labor time each fall.
- Water Country keeps all winterizing plugs/materials associated with a specific attraction together, in a safe place, inside the related filter building or pump house during the operating season. If the operators have any leftover plugs after an attraction is winterized in the fall, they know we've missed something.
- The waterpark uses Cyclone Liner Vacs to blow out the majority of the pool lines as well as push antifreeze through the lines. The park operators also plumbed in strategic PVC fittings, oftentimes on suction or return headers, which allow them to blow out multiple lines from one spot and direct air via the existing system valves. This saves the park setup time with the blower and allows operators to address multiple lines more quickly while reducing the chances of contaminating previously winterized lines.

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9) Focus on money-making activities like sponsorship deals and season-pass sales during the off-season period. Both Wilkes at Shipwreck Island and Bob Williams at Calaway Park in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, have had success in marketing season passes as stocking stuffers during the holidays. In addition, Shipwreck Island sells park merchandise on its web site for extra-low prices and rents out its parking lot and billboard space to event organizers or other businesses that need such services.

10) "As much as possible, close ready to open," says RECreation's Jones. Clean and buff mini-golf putters and balls. Clean and tune up golf carts. Repair or replace and clean waterpark inner tubes. The applications of this maxim are almost limitless. "If you can, store things ready to run. It makes for a spring opening that maximizes efficiency and minimizes surprises."

## Web Resources

- How to Winterize an Ornamental Garden—nine short videos from professional horticulturalist Mitch Baker.
- Winterize Your Batting and Soccer Cages—tips and techniques from Automated Batting Cages.
- Winterizing Your Irrigation System—detailed and climate-specific tips from professional landscaper Jess Stryker.

## Articles

“The On-Season,” FUNWORLD, 9/05: small park managers relate how they utilize the off-season.

“Checking the List,” FUNWORLD, 1/06: a maintenance-centered look at winterization.

“It Never Stops,” FUNWORLD, 9/07: FEC operators share their secrets to effective and thorough checks during the off-season.

“Off-Season – Free, Unlimited Bon Bons,” Blooloo.com, 10/10/08: Will Koch of Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari provides a detailed and demystifying look at his park’s off-season process.

“Precautions for the Cold: Winterizing Equipment,” Irrigation & Green Industry, 12/08: How to maintain and store your landscaping gear for the coming chill.

## Final Things to Consider

In creating your maintenance, upgrades, and administrative program for the winter, consider the following core areas:

- Ride disassembly, maintenance, and storage
- Games maintenance and storage, as well as merchandise storage
- Food and beverage cleanup and storage
- Physical plant maintenance (cleanup, repairs, painting, landscaping) and storage/closing in
- New construction for rides, buildings, or other projects
- Paperwork closeout for human resources, taxes, and government reports
- Operations assessment and next/new steps for coming season, as well as inventories and budgeting
- Sales/marketing/PR assessment and planning and implementation of new campaign(s)
- Seminars and other training opportunities for permanent staff
- Trade show shopping for new rides, games, merchandise, food and beverage, and other operational areas
- Vendor and sponsorship solicitation, negotiation, and contract completion
- Recruitment, hiring, and training of next round of seasonal staff

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