



ALEX DORGAN-ROSS/THE REGISTER

Tyler Lehman, an employee of Soil-Tek, sprays a mixture of compost and grass seed on a hillside behind the Clive Aquatic Center. The orange and black tubes in the background are filled with compost to absorb runoff.

Black goo to lush grass

Waukee and Clive are giving the new 'terraseding' process a try

By MEGAN HAWKINS
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The landscape of the Clive Aquatic Center and a Waukee roadside share a common transformation: In both places, a local company is changing the landscape with a new procedure for seeding.

The company, Soil-tek, uses a trademarked "terraseding" process that some experts hail as the latest and greatest process for growing grass.

To Clive pool patrons, that means replacing the light-brown clay with a temporary layer of rich, black compost and seed that will sprout into grass.

"In this product, they are recycling and reusing, and we've been very, very pleased with it."

Bart Weller, Clive public works director

In Waukee, the same mixture was slated to be blown across 3,000 linear feet along Warrior Lane and University Avenue this week.

"We use compost injected with seed," explained company owner Tom Truelsen, standing on a hill next to the aquatic center in hiking boots as his employees sprayed a dark mixture through an oversized hose. "With rain, this should turn green in under a week."

Truelsen started Soil-tek three years ago with Brad Blackman. Their company offers an alternative to sod or traditional grass seed. Both the business owners and their clients say terraseding is cheaper than sod and develops faster than seed.

Soil-tek terraseding costs 14 cents per square foot, compared with 25 to 40 cents per square foot for sod. To seed a 7,000 square foot lawn, sod would more

than double the cost at approximately \$2,100, compared with \$980 for terraseding.

Besides the cost, people are choosing the new method because the compost layer often holds water better and helps reduce erosion and runoff, in addition to keeping weed growth to a minimum.

Clive has used Soil-tek in three trial projects in the past two years, said Public Works Director Bart Weller. He first heard about the seeding method at a seminar given by the Metro Waste Authority, which supplies Soil-tek with compost from twigs, leaves and grass

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clippings.

"In this product, they are recycling and reusing, and we've been very, very pleased with it," Weller said.

Waukee is trying the process for the first time this week, said Brad Freeman, a Waukee inspector for the public works department. The

city wanted something new and opted to try terraseding along the shoulder of recently paved roads.

Terraseding is a good match for such areas, according to an Iowa State University study on the effectiveness of compost in reducing runoff and controlling erosion. During the 2000-02 study that endorsed the method, researchers applied 2- and 4-inch blankets of

compost to highway embankments with 30 percent slopes.

After watering, the areas were compared to conventional soil treatments. The compost treatments delayed runoff by at least 30 minutes. Total runoff was reduced by 80 percent, erosion by 99 percent and weed growth by 75 percent.

Soil-tek uses a variety of filters

to create different sizes of compost, from very fine to chunky. Seed is added later, when the mixture is being applied to the ground. Any kind of seed can be used, from grass to wildflowers, Truelsen said.

For areas with hills and slopes, such as at the aquatic center, the company fills biodegradable socks with compost, and lays them down

in place of black, mesh fences that normally fight erosion.

"When we're ready, we can either pick them up and get rid of them," Weller said, "or the bags will decompose or we can slit them open and rake the compost out. We don't have to go out and dig up any fences."

Truelsen applauds Clive officials for their willingness to try the new

process.

"The public works people have been very innovative in finding ways to use technology like this," he said. "It saves the city money, when you consider how much water it takes for seed and the expense of sod. That's important especially with the budget cuts."

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