
Winter Care of Centerpivots

Care of the centerpivot system this fall can reduce expenses for repairs and breakdowns next year. Here is a review to check against your procedures.

Make sure water is drained from all parts of the system. Be sure to check low pressure drain valves, sand traps, and volume gun control valves. Water left in the pipes can freeze and the resulting pressure can deform and or rupture pipes.

Close off points where mice can enter. Mice can get into the pipeline and both nests and chewing on rubber gaskets can be costly and cause plugging problems. It is a good idea to put a metal screen over the vacuum relief valve. Once in a pipeline the mice will chew rubber gaskets or plastic fittings. It is best to remove rubber gaskets and store them in a weak antifreeze solution so they will not dry out and crack as quickly. Mice bait stations placed on the pad could help to reduce mice problems. I would recommend using the sealed canary seed baits in the stations. Small wood or metal boxes with openings at ground level would serve as good bait stations.

All control boxes should be latched shut and all switches locked in the off position. Be sure they are mouse proofed with appropriate seals or metal screening. Change the motor oil and run the engine enough to lubricate all parts of the engine. Refill the cooling system with the proper antifreeze solution. Remove the battery and store it inside for the winter.

Electric motors and the pump handle needs to be protected from mice. Bill Rowe, at Norris Public Power says every year they have cases where significant damage is done to unprotected motors. Bill also urges irrigators to make a list of those delayed maintenance and repair items and get them done during the off season.

Pivots with injection equipment need to be sure the check valve is removed for the winter to protect it. Most injection units have a drain which needs to be checked to be sure all water is drained out.

To keep fuel in good shape, a stabilizer can be added to the gasoline or the tank can be drained. Do not drain diesel tanks, but do change the fuel filter and make sure all lines are full of fuel. The vaporizer-regulator on natural gas or propane engines should be drained of both fuel and water. About two ounces of oil can be poured in the spark plug holes to coat and protect the cylinder wall on spark ignition engines.

Tires should be inflated to the proper pressure and pivots should be parked pointing northwest or southeast direction to reduce potential wind damage. Parking a pivot next to a windbreak does reduce potential for wind damage, but often increases potential for snow to cover gear boxes and drive motors increasing potential water and corrosion damages.

Taking time to do these chores as soon as possible will insure that busy schedules don't interfere with timely winterization of this valuable equipment.

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