

Sports Turf Safety and Risk Management

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Our society is becoming increasingly "lawsuit conscious." In light of this new consumer mentality, sports turf managers need to have a thorough knowledge of safety both on and off the field. In this article, Dr. Mittlestaedt does a thorough job of covering many aspects of sports turf related safety issues.

We have to learn not to make excuses or to pass the blame. The grounds or turf manager must be concerned with consumer safety as well as occupational safety. Federal and provincial agencies control the workplace. Turf managers must have a base for understanding the concept of liability which results from mistakes. They need to be aware of and take advantage of the very large pool of professionals who are available to them.

Turf managers must also have a thorough knowledge of the green industry. The "deep pocket" syndrome has targeted all facets of the green industry when an injury occurs. The person who accepts the safety responsibility could be anybody in grounds management, the superintendent, or the pesticide operator. The accident aspect or risk responsibility is borne by an expert retained to provide an overview, preview, and review of the safety requirements necessary to prevent injuries or fatalities. This safety specialist should be regarded as the right hand of the grounds manager. The actions of this individual can affect the responsibility of the owner/operator and their agent, the grounds manager.

When safety is absent, negligence increases and injuries and fatalities often result. What happens next can turn into a litigative process. The sports turf manager must be aware of the safety measures that are necessary for sports turf today. As new safety measures, tools, and techniques are developed to enhance the consumer environment, they must be disseminated throughout the profession. Sports turf safety measures are applicable in many types of venues. Many have other planning, designing, and engineering criteria that affect safety which add to the generic measure that will be discussed. These venue-specific criteria are too numerous to address today; however, they may be obtained by contacting the Recreation Safety Institute.

How can you make your sports field a safer place? Follow the pointers mentioned in this list and you will be well on your way to better, safer sports turf:

- Eliminate holes, ruts, ridges, settlement areas, grass bumps, texture/mass differences, and entrapments along fence lines which differ from the surrounding lawn area.
- Perform constant and consistent mowing throughout the turf area at an average height that conforms to the type of play or sport.
- Check the seams on artificial turf and or butting edges to other materials.
- Remove obstacles or structures from game areas on turf fields, e.g. above ground irrigation.
- Spray for insects, wasps, bees, ants, and others that may nest in lawn areas.

- Establish appropriate barriers between lawn uses.
- Secure both non-public and/or non-consumer access areas.
- Establish emergency ingress and egress routes for ambulances, service vehicles, etc. to avoid transport getting bogged down in lawn areas.
- Check clearances for perimeter ancillary facilities, e.g. tables, TV cameras, light standards, scoreboards, and other such features.
- Conform to game rules e.g. shoe or traction performance, ball performance, and impact attenuation.
- Determine the most appropriate turf be it artificial or natural and the type of either for the potential use. Standards are in process today to measure the various characteristics for both artificial and natural turf systems through the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM).
- Establish specifications for the safe use of vehicles and other equipment used in the maintenance of sports fields that the public may come into contact with such as mowers, seeders, sprayers, or cultivators (the public being all who use those facilities, including students, etc.).
- Establish controls and storage procedures for materials including fertilizers, pesticides, gasoline, aluminum irrigation pipes, and drainage pipes.
- Adopt procedures for safe spraying, fertilizing, and other turf preparation methods.
- Prepare regulations setting forth those rules encompassing



the various prohibitions that must be posted before, during, and after a work effort.

- Enforce a planned prohibition sign system and ensure that it conforms with CSA or municipal standards and other criteria.
- Formulate a schedule of warning labels that must be placed on any area that the public or an employee may come into contact with that might be of a toxic nature (check MSDS sheets).
- Outline a schematic layout of all protective devices that are in use or must be in use in the care and requirement of each person and where are they kept.
- Prepare a policy for all emergency treatment that can be applied by staff, first-aiders, or emergency service response personnel. This is for both the public and employees and should conform to local health standards, ASTM, CSA, and other medical authority guidelines.
- Prepare a policy for incident procedures that staff involved with the public assembly turf areas must execute in coordination with other authorities.
- Establish a plan in case of disaster or emergency such as fire, storm, explosion, or tornadoes.
- Update game line materials such as foul lines or ditches etc., so they do not affect either the player or the spectator from an injury point of view.
- Review protective barrier types around fields to ensure they are or will not splinter, e.g. old wooden snow fence slats, steel stakes, and wire strands.
- Review cable, TV, and speaker conduit connections and make sure they are covered and that warnings are posted.
- Establish an inspection routine using written forms to pin-

point hazards and dangers. Ensure an individual is designated to do repairs and follow-up to correct these defects.

- Train and prepare personnel in preventative and corrective turf and field maintenance programs.
- Check the condition of under-surface irrigation or drainage devices, couplings, and sprinkler heads and remove exposed parts that could impede or impale a player.
- Review on-field drain systems and perimeter based designs for potential hazards such as ditches, culverts, street drains, or covers.

These are only a few of the many safety measures that I have been exposed to as an expert and a designer in the field. These are safety concerns that you should not forget nor disregard. We may simply think of the green industry as the enhancers and maintainers of turf and other orchestrations, but reality dictates that we are becoming the targets of a legally conscious society. We should not allow this and other exposures to prevent our use of sports turf. Include safety consciousness and awareness in your work ethic tomorrow and in the future. ♦

Editor's Note: If you have questions with regard to this article or other field safety concerns, please contact Dr. A. Mittlestaedt Jr. at The Recreation Safety Institute; Tel. (516) 883-6399 or by fax at (516) 883-1814.

Include safety consciousness and awareness in your work ethic tomorrow and in the future.

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