

From the GTI Advisor

ROB WITHERSPOON SPEAKS OUT ON PESTICIDE BANS

Further to my columns on pesticide bans, I would like to touch briefly on pesticide bans and their potential impact on sports fields. As the majority of fields in Canada are managed by public agencies like municipalities and school boards, sports turf managers are probably at the leading edge of managing turf with minimal inputs. Many cities and school boards have cut back or eliminated pesticide use, in many cases for budgetary reasons as opposed to environmental concerns. I feel for the sports turf managers who have the knowledge and expertise to manage their fields but lack the budgetary support to do the job.

As a result, the state of many publicly operated sports fields is less than ideal. Goal mouth areas are mud holes and prostrate knotweed is the predominant plant species on the field. Although I have not seen the results of any studies in this area, I would speculate that the safety risk to children of poorly maintained sports fields is exponentially greater than any potential health risk associated with pesticide

use. In the absence of pesticide use, many of these fields do not even receive a minimum of good cultural practices such as fertilization, aeration and overseeding.

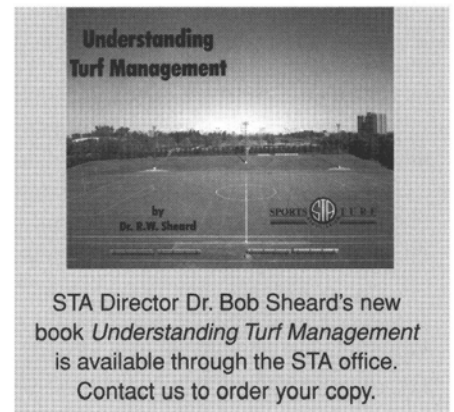
Hopefully the current drive to improve the safety of playground equipment will extend to the playing fields. Investment in good construction and maintenance of sports fields can only provide positive impacts such as improved recreational opportunities for youth and improved fitness which I suspect would also lead to better performance in the classroom and a healthier society placing less demands on our health care system.

The challenge is finding resources at a time when the need for classroom materials and municipal infrastructure upgrades are competing for the same resources. Perhaps alternative sources for support can be found in the private sector. Many companies already provide land and recreational facilities for their employees that are shared with the community. A number of large sports complex developments are already being built utilizing a public-private

sector shared funding model. We certainly have the knowledge and expertise to provide safe and healthy sports turf with a minimum of pesticide use. Hopefully pesticide bans will not become another excuse for poorly constructed and maintained sports fields. ♦

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