

Question/Answer "Murphy's Law"

Dr. James Murphy is an Associate Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management for Rutgers, department of Plant science.

Ask Dr. Murphy your questions: E-mail us at hq@sfmanj.org

Question: The soccer fields in our area are currently dormant, brown and dry as a bone. If these conditions continue can permanent or excessive damage to the turf result from typical play on the fields?

Answer: Absolutely!

Dormant turf has very low vigor. Dormant turf has prepared itself to survive without water; but not to withstand intense traffic. Thus, the low vigor of the dormant turfgrass plants will only be able to tolerate a very limited amount of traffic.

Signs of severe damage include thin open turf and bare soil. The lower leaf sheaths and crowns of the turfgrass plants have been and will continue to be damaged once you start to see bare soil in the playing field. This is a serious

problem because regeneration of new healthy shoots and roots come from the crowns. Dead crowns translates into dead grass with no hope for recovery (I can not word it more bluntly)!

If you can still find crowns as a fresh, translucent green appearance, then the turf can recover. Dried up, brown crowns are severely damaged and have a high probability of being dead. Weed invasion is another problem with intense use (traffic) under dormant turf conditions. The dormant turf wears out very quickly with use. Once natural rains return or irrigation is applied, the dormant weed seeds in the soil have ample opportunity to germinate, emerge, and infest the field. Thus, you will likely observe greater weed problem on fields that receive significant play (use) under dormant conditions. ♦

Field Tip Reality, What A Concept

by Jim Hermann, CSFM*

- Reality is the difference between a state of the art utility vehicle that gums, carts and dumps and a 1980 pickup truck equipped with a length of chain link fence.

- Reality is the difference between a ten-man grounds crew for one field and a one-man grounds crew for ten fields.

- Reality is the difference between what works on paper and what works in the field.

- Reality is the difference between treating for crabgrass and being thankful the field is green.

In the realm of absolute right and absolute wrong, if your lucky, reality

Continued on page 8

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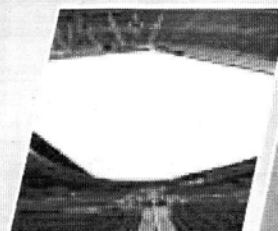
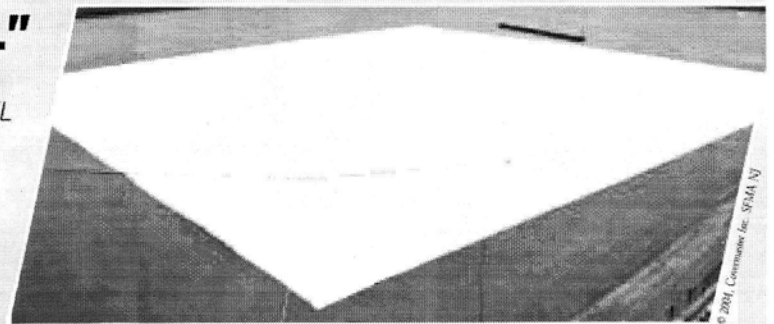
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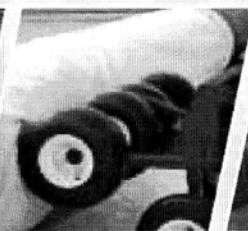
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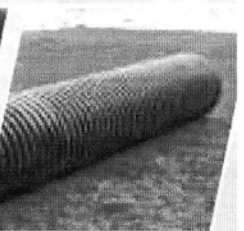
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lies somewhere in the middle.

Accepted yet never formally discussed, reality is the single most limiting factor in the management of every athletic field. Dealing with and understanding the effects and consequences of reality is a primary objective for every sports field manager. It is kind of like putting a round peg in a square hole and making it fit.

Reality should never be used as an excuse. A clear vision of what is ideal should always be maintained as a point of reference for what is real. In order to evaluate what we can do, it is important to know what we should do. Education is critical. Education is a like a road map. We are taught the most direct route. As sports field managers we learn to deal with roadblocks. We learn to get around obstacles. There is no such thing, as "I can't get there from here".

Sometimes we need to look at our objectives from a different perspective. I often times discuss selection of the proper infield mix. Ideally, selection of the proper infield mix should be based on an understanding of the physical analysis of that product and how different percentages of sand, silt and clay affect the characteristics of that product. In reality, selection of an acceptable mix is more often based on price. Therefore, a more realistic objective for the sports field manager would be to have the ability to recognize and understand the characteristics of the infield mix chosen, rather than the ability to choose a mix based on an understanding of its characteristics. The key point remains, an understanding of infield mixes.

We are all aware or should be aware that soil testing is critical if a quality turf is to be established and maintained. Unfortunately when recommendations are made based on soil test results; these recommendations vary from field to field. Ideally, each field should be treated precisely as the recommendations have prescribed. Realistically, you and I both know "that may not happen". Typically in a situation like this I would select a fertilizer formulation that addresses the needs of all the fields but may not provide the nutrients required by some fields in the total prescribed amount.

An agronomist once told me that

soil testing should be used as a means of determining soil fertility trends. These trends are determined by periodic testing on a yearly or biyearly schedule. What that means to me is that, within limits of acceptability, as long as the fertility of a field is headed in the right direction, I'm a happy camper. The education received on what is ideal has allowed for the ability to discern what is acceptable and real.

It was once said, "although the

primary objective may be to drain the swamp, it is sometimes difficult to remain focused when you are up to your butt in alligators". A clear vision of the objectives and the ability to prioritize applications and procedures is key in dealing with reality.

*Jim Hermann, is a Certified Sports Field Manager and serves on the Board of Directors of SFMANJ and is President of Total Control Athletic Field Management. ♦

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