

## MAINTENANCE OF ARTIFICIAL TURFS

by Gil Lloyd  
Assistant Superintendent  
MSU Grounds Department

We are very fortunate here at Michigan State University since we have artificial turf in our athletic areas, practically eliminating all maintenance problems just as was promised by the representatives of those firms promoting such fine surfaces. This is a fine positive statement to make; but, we have one footnote to add and it is a substantial one. There is, and always will be, maintenance work to be performed on any surface whether it be natural turf, synthetic turf, concrete, asphalt, wood, or even plain old dirt after it is used for special events, including athletic activities. We do not have comparative figures to give you on maintenance costs, but we can say that the expenditures now are at least one-half of those for our football stadium field when it was in natural turf. You will note that this is maintenance only, with no consideration of the initial installation costs.

Since this is a turf conference, we better not get into the pros and cons of either playing surface because there are many attending who have a strong vested interest in the turf industry, myself included. Anyway, back to the maintenance of our "Tartan Turf", a 3-M product, which was installed in August 1969 on an 8" base of asphaltic concrete. There are several brands and types of artificial turfs available but since we have all Tartan Turf here at Michigan State, our remarks will apply only to the experiences we have had with it.

Let us work our way through a twelve month maintenance schedule as we see it for the football stadium field.

January, February, and March are months of NO-CARE, especially if it is not covered with a tarp as we have always done. 3-M now recommends a cover during winter, perhaps to keep dust and foreign materials from accumulating. A vacuum unit is used to sweep the surface beginning in April and on a weekly schedule through spring football practice into mid-May. Occasionally cleaning will be necessary during June, July, and August when we make necessary repairs to the carpet surface itself. We also hose it down once during the summer to remove any accumulated dust or other fine materials. Annual painting of all the field lines is completed during this time period, ahead of fall football practice starting September 1, with some touch-up during the fall where traffic from the game is greatest.

Various machines are necessary to make the surface playable under conditions of rain or snow during the September, October and November football season in addition to weekly sweeping. After the football season is over in late November, there is nothing more to do until next spring again.

Contrary to all the assurances presented by promoters of artificial surfaces, a few problems have shown up! Cigarette butts will burn the surface so you have to keep people away from the field as much as possible

Gum sticks readily, of course, but can be frozen with a pressurized spray can of special gum remover, called Dynasurf, and then scraped off with a sharp knife. Tearing or ripping can occur under extreme conditions such as a wild crowd of students tearing the aluminum goal posts down and dragging the sharp surfaces off the field. Vandalism could be a problem; however, we have been fortunate so far and possibly this is due to tighter security of all field entrances year-round. You also must watch your equipment closely for oil leaks and dropping of grease on the surface the same as you would for your living room carpet. The joints where each five-foot wide strip of carpet meet are opening up to some degree and have required regluing at these points. 3-M now installs the surface in 15 foot widths which reduces this problem considerably.

And now to summarize our remarks, where can you find a surface that will take the punishment from tramping feet, football shoes, vehicles, and football practice machines through the spring and fall seasons, yet require a minimum of maintenance. Artificial turfs have our vote for these extremely high use areas after four years of maintenance experience.