FLOODLIGHTS & FENCING

A recent Ontario Hydro bulletin described the circumstances of an electrical contact fatality which occurred earlier this year. On May 23, 1993, a five year old female was electrocuted when she touched a snow fence in a sports park. The snow fence became energized when the light standard it was fastened to shorted out as a result of a faulty fixture and poor grounding of the conductor. The factors that contributed to the fatality included the fastening of the snow fence to the conduit on the pole, corrosion of a buried ground clamp, moisture in the floodlight, and a crack in the floodlight case.

Ontario Hydro recommends that municipalities check all pole-mounted floodlight installations in sports parks - particularly any installation where metal conduit or other electrically grounded metal rod is situated within 8 feet of the ground.

The following actions are recommended to reduce the probability of such an occurrence being repeated in your municipality.

1. Remove all conducting fences or other conducting non-electrical material attached to or conducting metal conduits on poles supporting floodlights.
2. Ensure that any metal within 8 feet of the ground and forming part of the electrical installation is properly grounded. Where grounding the conduit is accomplished by a local grounding rod, corroded grounding clamps should be replaced with ground clamps certified to meet the requirements of CIA Standard C22.2 NO.41. Special attention should be given to buried clamps. Replacement clamps must be certified for direct burial.

The maintenance of sports field lighting is usually the responsibility of the municipality and while the actual work may be done by the local utility, it should be noted that only the Electrical Inspection Department of Ontario Hydro is qualified and authorized to insect customer owned facilities and determine if a particular installation is safe and in compliance with the Electrical Safety Code of Ontario.

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FOCUS ON SAFETY

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS in the DESIGN of

ATHLETIC and SPORT FIELDS

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Athletic and sports fields are facilities which have undergone years of scrutiny and change. There can be no question that rules of the game, regulations for play, criteria for development and maintenance, and a host of other recommendations abound for such field areas. It is not the intent of the author to repeat what is known about design and ultimate construction and operation of such field areas, but to highlight those elements that affect the safety of the players and spectators. As a result of the wealth of knowledge compiled to date and our unending quest for further information, personal injuries are becoming less attributed to the care of the owner or operator and more to the recklessness of the players or spectators.

However, when an injury occurs, the victim looks to others to pinpoint the blame. That, plus an aggressive litigation environment and an array of books, criteria, handbooks, and other documents, plus numerous court decisions and theories of negligence, enables specialized experts to have their own "field day". A sympathetic jury makes the final decision, usually in favour of the injured party, which means that the owner/operator cannot afford to make mistakes. It is imperative that the owner/operator of any type of athletic or sports field recognize that he cannot designate an alternate for the responsibility but must face it squarely. He must ensure and assure that every reasonable effort is and has been made to reduce his exposure. Diligence, not negligence, is the byword.

The focus of the operation of a field is predicated on its design and construction, an integral but yet separate responsibility, and subject to subsequent liability. There is no such thing as a sports field facility that is not designed. Any forethought given to the use of a piece of land, whether it is already flat or has been graded, is considered design. Although every state has licensed professional engineers and landscape architects who have licenses to practice the design of such fields and certify their correctness, very few fields are certifiable. Only 2% of the sports fields now in existence have been designed with the advice of such professionals. Most have been designed by the owner's bulldozer operator, landscape contractor, athletic administrator, athletic trainer, manufacturer, turf grower, grounds keeper, or other such person. When an accident happens, the "discovery process" ultimately proves negligence, because nobody was charged with the responsibility, or assumed the responsibility, for the care of the fields. Those lay persons usually involved in the design were probably not aware of the state of the art in sports field design and construction. Thus, an accident happens, and, ultimately, a judgement or settlement results in favour of the injured party

What can be considered exposure today as it relates to athletic field liability? Virtually every aspect of sports field development and management is vulnerable.

This paper addresses concerns related to the design and subsequent construction of athletic and sports field facilities. In order to put into perspective the guidelines as set forth, it is critical that a difference be made between those fields used by amateurs for play and those used by professionals for play. These guidelines address fields used for amateur play, although there is no distinguishing difference between spectators of both amateur and professional play; thus, the guidelines cover safety for spectators of both amateur and professional teams. It must also be noted that if such guidelines are appropriate for professional play, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration would be responsible for advancing these safety concerns.