

SPORTS TURF MANAGER

... for better, safer Sports Turf

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Snow Mould

What to Do to Protect Your Fields

If you believe what the weather forecasters say, we can expect a long cold winter in the days ahead. A winter like this usually translates into lots of snow, and this creates perfect conditions for snow mould diseases to develop and thrive.

Snow mould can be devastating on turf, especially on golf courses where entire greens can be wiped out over the winter. This same result can happen on sports fields, so it is in the best interests of the sports field manager to be aware of the potential effects of snow mould diseases and work on preventing their development.

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There are two types of snow mould, pink (*Fusarium*) and grey (*Typhula* sp.), which can affect all cool season turfgrasses. Annual bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and creeping bentgrass are highly susceptible. The disease occurs under snow cover, and the results become evident after snow melt.

Conditions which favour the development of snow mould are: long periods of snow cover; temperatures around the freezing point (0-15°C) under high moisture conditions; and long grass under high nitrogen conditions.

You will know if you have snow mould if circular patches from 10-25 cm with a bleached appearance appear after snow melt. These areas can overlap to form large irregular patches. Longer turf may show general blighting. Under severe conditions (usually snow cover for more than 90 days), large areas of turf can be affected leading to crowns and roots being killed with little or no recovery in the spring. Snow mould tends to persist in the same areas from year to year.

To help prevent snow mould development, the following cultural methods can be employed to lessen the effects:

- minimize thatch;
- avoid succulent growth going into late fall;
- improve air circulation, remove excess water, and rake leaves;
- avoid compaction on the field from snowmobiles, etc.; and
- try to prevent the formation of large snow drifts by using windbreaks and snow fencing.

Preventative fungicides can also be applied in late fall to sports fields, bowling greens, and areas which seem to get snow mould every year. Consult product labels and provincial publications for products, uses, and recommended rates.

After winter, if damage has occurred, rake the matted areas to encourage drying. If the turfgrass has been killed, seeding, sodding, or other measures may be required.

Snow mould can be a potentially devastating disease. However, if turfgrass areas are prepared properly, the effects can be greatly minimized, resulting in turf which is healthy and playable earlier in the spring. ♦

— Harold Van Gool

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Firming up Your Winter Schedule?

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