

# National standards for public ball fields? It could happen yet.

**Beyond lining fields, filling holes, and reseeding, facility and parks and recreation managers must take a more critical look at the whole picture.**

■ If you watch football, you've seen this—the 250-pound linebacker blasts the 220-pound running back out of bounds. The wildly spinning running back flattens a photographer. Or sends a rain of paper cups and liquid into the air as he bowls over a table just yards away from the playing field.

"There's something very wrong with this," says Francis "Bud" Cosgrove, who thinks this not uncommon scene indicates a peculiarly cavalier attitude toward safety and liability.

These types of safety issues aren't tied directly to the condition of a field's playing surface. They are field-related, however, and are ultimately the responsibility of the sports facility operator or the parks/recreation director.

Cosgrove says two excellent reasons why sports and parks managers will have to broaden their view of field maintenance are: (1) the growing awareness of participant and spectator safety issues and (2) operator liability.

Cosgrove, with the Nassau County (Long Island) Recreation and Parks Department, is working on national minimum standards for ball field design and maintenance. Under the umbrella of the American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM), he's assembled a committee to start developing these standards.

These efforts, at least initially, focus on community softball and baseball fields.

Organizations such as the American Softball Association and the United States Baseball Federation, along with several sporting goods manufacturers, say they'll support Cosgrove's effort.

"The response so far has been excellent," claims Cosgrove.

These proposed standards would



**Cosgrove: It's time to 'regroup' and establish minimum standards.**

include, but aren't limited to, maintaining the turfgrass playing surfaces.

Beyond lining fields, filling holes, and reseeding, facility operators and parks/recreation managers must take a more critical look at fences, the location of light poles, spectator seating, out-of-bounds areas, and more.

"We're going to have to be informed of not only the turf infield environment but of the entire picture," says Cosgrove.

"The first thing we as operators (recre-

ation or parks managers) should be doing is understanding our exposure. We have to analyze the kinds of activities that take place on a regular basis on our facilities."

Cosgrove suggests parks and recreation managers also develop:

- **Written emergency and accident response and reporting methods.** When accidents come to light, there should be an established procedure to respond to them and document them. "If you ever have to go to court, this will be invaluable," he says.

- **Written operation safety guidelines.** Cosgrove says parks and recreation managers should more aggressively insist that amateur ball players, particularly adult players, take more responsibility for their own behavior. This past season his community also issued a list of 12 guidelines (no alcohol, women at least six months pregnant must get a doctor's permission to continue playing, etc.) that athletes must follow for safer play.

- **Written criteria for field maintenance.** A checklist is a must. "Once these checklists are in place, it's our obligation to make sure those fields are inspected and if there's a problem that it's corrected."

Cosgrove says although his initial plan involved establishing national minimum standards for softball fields (he thinks advances in ball and bat design and materials are making many ball fields obsolete), he feels standards can be drawn for other types of fields as well.

"What we're trying to say from an operators' point of view is, 'Let's regroup and think these things out because there are a lot of ball fields that just aren't acceptable,'" says Cosgrove.

—Ron Hall



**Would minimum standards keep this from happening as often?**