

# IPM:

## a real workout for field supers

*The rigors of integrated pest management must be balanced against constant demand for athletic fields.*

by MIKE SCHILLER / Rolling Meadows (Ill.) Park District

**Y**ou can't please all the people all the time, yet that's a challenge that most athletic field managers face every day of the year. One of the newer challenges we face is working Integrated Pest Management (IPM) into the mix of field management duties. IPM is smart. It makes sense to help turf fight its own battles by providing optimum growing conditions and adopting maintenance procedures to enhance turf health.

Standards of "acceptable" levels of pest infestation are fairly easy to establish. Observation is a bit more difficult, but can be managed by properly training personnel and issuing timely "pest alerts."

Alternative methods of defending against pest attacks include cultural practices and using control products.

### **People at play**

So why is IPM any more difficult for athletic field managers?

For starters: no other turf has the same "up-close-and-personal" connection with people as an athletic field during a sporting event.

Sports activities take place on the turf and frequently in the turf. As golfers



Schiller: Make sure to keep accurate records of what was done, when, why and how.

stroll across the fairways and peer closely at the greens, baseball players dive for balls and slide into bases. Soccer players hurl their bodies into a play, and football players are downed more often than the ball.

Athletic fields that are safe, highly playable and aesthetically pleasing are the expected—and often, demanded—“right” of all players, and the goal of every athletic field manager who cares about the profession.

The goal—the image the public expects—is the beautifully-manicured field that appears on the TV screen. But the costs of building and maintaining such premium fields are seldom announced to the general public.

#### Many mandates

Regulations to control the handling and application procedures and use-notification requirements for pest control products and other turf and landscape care products come from more than one governing body:

- 1) Federal, state, county, or city governmental agencies or by government-related regulatory agencies.
- 2) City or county boards in charge of parks and recreation facilities; these include school boards, a board of regents or even the owners and board of directors of a privately owned facility.
- 3) Athletic field users. Generally their mandates are formulated and issued by the supervisory personnel who coordinate the activities of the players. This may be the athletic director and group of coaches for a school system; the organizing board and coaches of league players for a park and recreation district or the coaching staff of pro-level teams.

4) “Unofficial” mandates of the community. These may be expressed by media “watchdogs,” neighborhood action committees or individual activists.

Community mandates may also come from team supporters, even those far removed from the region geographically or at the college level, from alumni groups or individual alums.

5) The players. Adult teams are usually represented by team spokespersons; booster clubs speak for the condition of the children’s playing fields.

All these groups have legitimate concerns about athletic field conditions and about the safety and environmental impact of products and procedures used in field management.



**User groups must understand that field use in certain conditions may put players at risk for injury.**

often used for physical education classes, and those fields serve as overflow space for afternoon recess. They’re the site for team practices before and after school hours and on weekends, when no games are scheduled. At the high school and college level, they’re used for club and intramural practices and games and for marching band practice.

On weekdays, parks and recreation fields host scheduled practices and games from after school or after work until dark. Weekend play takes up entire days, and evenings on lighted fields.

With tight budgets and limited staff levels, it’s hard for the sports turf managers at these facilities to find non-use time to fit in necessary procedures and ensure the fields stay empty during the posted or non-posted intervals.

Many IPM-related procedures require special training or certification. Most procedures are limited by rain, wind or temperature extremes; some require irrigation before and after. It’s a juggling act to coordinate field use schedules with weather conditions, equipment acquisition and training, especially when you factor in unexpected changes in field use schedules due to weather-related adjustments or increased playing time.

The sports turf manager often becomes the communications director. He or she personally contacts coaches and scheduling personnel to plan schedules that will satisfy demand.

Ideally, all user groups understand that field maintenance procedures, including those that are IPM related, are in their best interest.

Groups that refuse to cooperate with schedule changes or who insist on using fields during restricted periods may cause damage that will take extensive field down-time to repair.

The athletic field manager communicates to the public and keeps precise records of all IPM-related activities. Any IPM-related action or procedure may be questioned at any time by one of the above-mentioned groups. □

#### Time constraints

Professional fields and most college-level game fields have a built-in window of opportunity for cultural and other pest control procedures.

Team travel to away games provides a time for field work. During these periods, activity on the field is often limited to that directed by the sports turf manager.

Most other fields are used by the public.

School fields are