

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

EVENTS

CALENDAR

LIABILITY TO CHALLENGE QUALITY IN FUTURE



This past week I received phone calls from two different insurance companies inquiring about safety standards for sports fields. They called the magazine because they were unable to locate a set of recognized safety standards for the millions of acres of athletic turf in the United States from industry associations.

All I could report to them was the work initiated by the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) two years ago. This work was supported primarily by the manufacturers of artificial turf. Even though a number of major specifiers and builders of natural turf systems attended the ASTM meeting in Phoenix in 1989, their input seemed to be utilized mainly as a benchmark for the safety of artificial turf.

Ironically, no representative of the insurance industry attended the meeting. Apparently we have now caught their attention.

Up to this point, superintendents and groundskeepers have been judged by the quality of their turf. Things like color, density, uniformity, bounce, and roll have been the key issues. All these are qualities visible to the eye. If a turf area scores well in all these categories, we often assume it is safe too. That might be changing.

The primary focus of those trying to quantify safety on our sports turf is hardness. Technology currently exists to measure hardness and compaction. Simple penetrometers or more advanced impact absorption meters can be used to test the hardness of any surface. A number of people who have tried these devices report some fields are nearly as hard as concrete.

The next step is to track field-related injuries and compare them to field hardness. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University and Michigan State University are heading in this direction. Once a clear relationship between field hardness and injuries is established, and insurance companies find out about it, we will have a new ball game.

Insurance companies will associate field hardness with safety. They will judge their exposure to liability claims on hardness ratings. For some, this will mean higher premiums. However, by exposing hard, high-risk fields, claims and premiums can be reduced. These savings can then be attributed to the work of the skilled turf manager.

We all want our fields to be as safe as possible. We also realize that budgets don't always allow us to meet quality standards, much less safety standards. If insurance companies can help us justify the budgets we need, let's welcome them with open arms.

Properly managed turf translates into safe turf. In the near future, safe turf will be linked to lower liability. That should get the attention of those who think sports turf management is simple and finally bring much-deserved recognition for those who have been concentrating on safety, as well as quality, all along.

Bruce Shank

JUNE

27 Field Day, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Contact: New York State Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 612, Latham, NY 12110, (800) 873-8873.

JULY

25 Facilities Management Seminar, Professional Grounds Management Society, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. Contact: PGMS, 10402 Ridgland Road, Suite 4, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

28-30 International Power Equipment Expo, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville, KY. Contact: Expo '91, (800) 558-8767 or (502) 473-1992.

29 Turfgrass Field Day, South Farm, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO. Contact: Missouri Valley Turfgrass Association, 344 Hearnes Center, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, (314) 882-4087.

30 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, Midwest Regional Turf Foundation, Purdue University Agronomy Research Center, West Lafayette, IN. Contact: Clark Throssell, (317) 494-4785.

31 Griffin Field Day, Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association, Georgia Experiment Station, Griffin, GA. Contact: Karen White, GGCSA, P.O. Box 683, Watkinsville, GA 30677, (404) 769-4076.

31-2 American Sod Producers Association Summer Conference and Field Day, Red Lion Inn-Lloyd Center, Portland, OR. Contact: ASPA, 1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008, (708) 705-9898.

AUGUST

1 Turfgrass Research Field Day, National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, USDA Beltsville Agricultural Research Center-West, Beltsville, MD. Contact: Kevin Morris, USDA-BARC-West, Building 001, Room 333, Beltsville, MD 20705, (301) 344-2125.

5-6 Summer Meeting, Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association, Lake Lanier Islands Hotel and Golf Club, Lake Lanier Islands, GA. Contact: Karen White, GGCSA, P.O. Box 683 Watkinsville, GA 30677, (404) 769-4076.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, *Golf & SportsTURF*, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Fax: (818) 781-8517.