Can you identify this sports turf problem?

Problem: Brown circles on turf
Turfgrass Area: Athletic field
Location: Iowa
Grass Variety: Ryegrass/bluegrass blend

Answer to John Mascaro’s Photo Quiz on Page 37
John Mascaro is President of Turf-Tec International

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The brown circles were a mystery to the sports turf manager so he called in Dr. Dave Minner from Iowa State to help him solve the sudden appearance of these brown areas about a week after a band competition. When Dr. Minner examined the areas, he found that all the brown areas contained glitter. Knowing that glitter will not harm turfgrass, they investigated further and after examining a video of the event numerous times, they determined that the spots came from the flag twirlers! During the band competition, this team had placed sparkle glitter and baking soda inside their flags produce a “smoke effect” during the unfurling of the flags. The inset photo shows glitter still on the ground in the brown areas. Dr. Minner determined that baking soda in minute amounts is usually harmless to turf, however it can be caustic to plants when applied at a high enough rate, thus causing the brown circles. To help correct the problem, the sports turf manager aerated, overseeded, and watered very heavily for about three weeks. He reported that the grass came back without any noticeable spots reappearing.

Photo taken by Dr. Minner ISU, submitted by Mike Andresen, CSFM, at Iowa State University. Story told by Don Peterson, sports turf manager at Ankeny High School in Ankeny, IA.

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