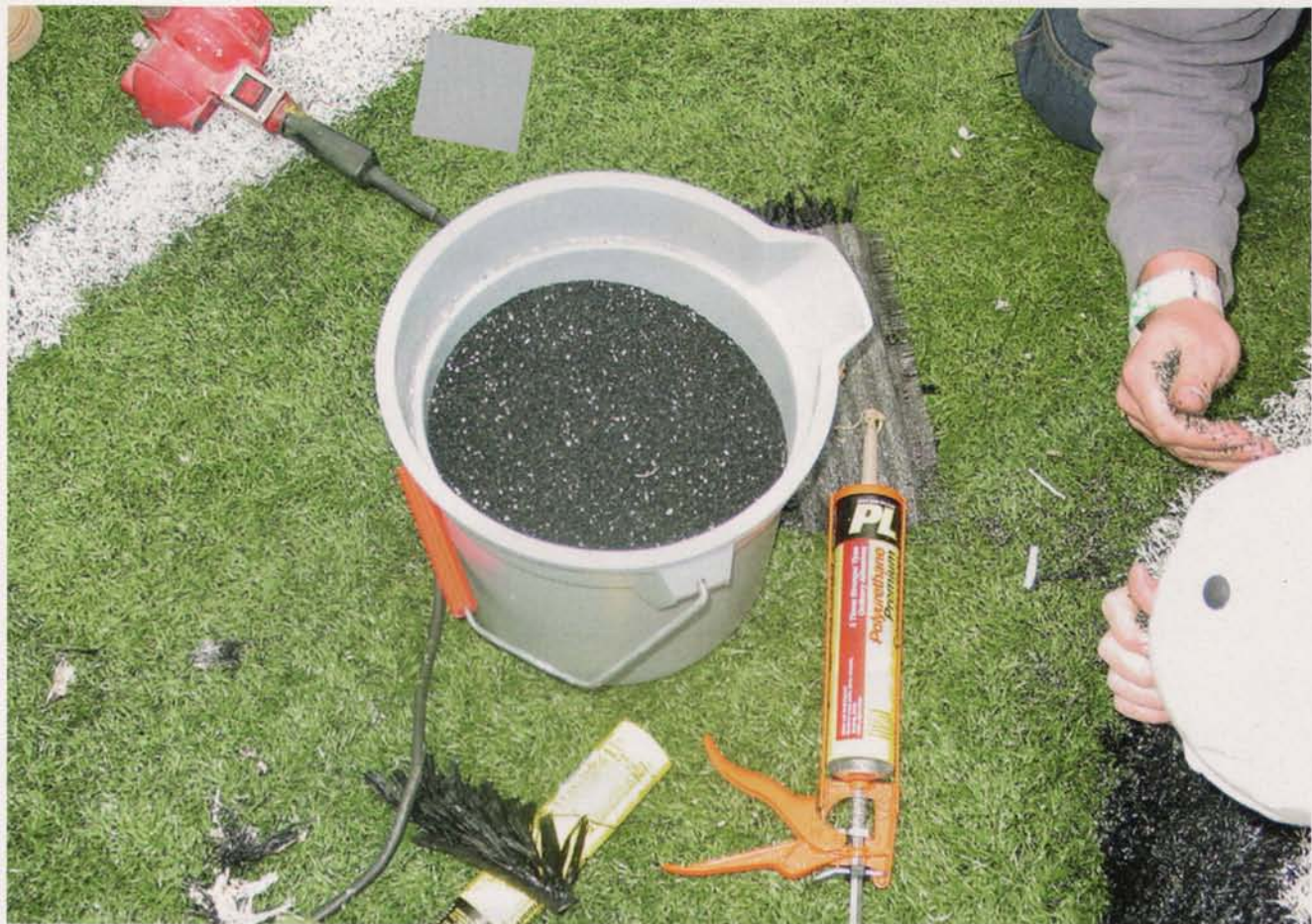


# Questions for potential infill contractors

By James Hlavaty and Darian Daily



**P**resently there are three types of sports field managers: ones who currently maintain an infill system, ones who are having an infill system installed, and ones who are investigating having one installed.

There are numerous issues that must be taken into account when choosing a company to install and construct an infill surface. This article will discuss some of the basic questions that need to be answered by the manufacturers, and by you, the owner.

## Pre-construction

The first question to answer is whether you want to hire a consultant, who will assist with writing the bid documents, help you evaluate the companies, and most importantly, have lots of experience with infill field construction. A consultant will also insure that you will receive the proper materials that are called for in the specs as well as making certain that no corners are cut in the installation. In short, consultants provide quality control.



Next, are there any upgrades needed on your field, such as improved drainage, additional electrical outlets, added communications lines, etc? The cost of adding these services will be much higher once the carpet has been laid. If the funds are available, and if you think you may need it, put it in.

The next decision is the amount of area to be covered. As we collected information about infill systems during the renovation at Paul Brown Stadium (PBS), we talked with several high schools and asked what they would do differently. The number one response was that they would add the synthetic turf in the "D" area on their football fields. (The "D's" are the areas behind the goal posts and in front of the athletics track. This is usually the area for the long jump and pole vault pits.) The people we spoke with said that leaving grass in the "D" area creates a maintenance nightmare. By not having the "D" area covered, you must have staff to maintain the grass. A major side effect is that grass clippings get into the infill and contaminates the mix. Also, it is more likely that weeds will start to grow in the infill.

There are also other issues to decide. Do you want logos? Do you want the lines to be inlaid? What other sports will be using the new surface? Do you want specific markings from those sports inlaid?

## Do your homework

The first step in selecting an infill company is to narrow the companies down to a manageable number. When we started the search for PBS, there were 52 different surfaces. We called numerous other facilities in the country to see how their surfaces are performing so we could narrow the number of companies. Another way is to contact different companies and ask for a reference list. This activity begins to give you a feel for the companies.

Once you have narrowed to a manageable number, (we suggest no more than four to five), send out a questionnaire. During our investigation, we found that these questions should be mainly numbers answers, yes or no answers, or two to three word answers. This will allow a data sheet to be put together.

The questionnaire should ask each company its specifications for the carpet. Ask questions such as face weight and denier. Have the companies describe their backing and how the water will drain through the carpet backing, and also how the seams are joined together. Ask if they suggest an E-pad, what their infill material is made of (percentage of rubber, sand, or other), and any other questions you feel are important.



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## **FACILITY & OPERATIONS**

After the questionnaires are returned, take the information and put it on one sheet of paper. We found this was helpful to compare all the companies.

Once all the information is collected, set up a face-to-face meeting with each company. At this time ask the questions that could not be answered in three to four words in the questionnaire. Ask questions about warranties, span, how the field will be constructed, who will install it, other installations in the area, and legal questions (insurance, lawsuits, etc.).

**THE WARRANTY WILL ONLY BE AS GOOD AS THE COMPANY. IF THE COMPANY GOES OUT OF BUSINESS, THEN YOU MAY LOSE YOUR WARRANTY.**

Ask the company if it does design-builds and will they do the project "turnkey." Turnkey is when one company handles all the work, the sub-base, base, and carpet installation. You should insist that one company handle the entire project. Research from other turf managers shows that if there are issues with the field, such as poor drainage, grade unevenness, etc., and if there were multiple contractors, finger-pointing occurs and nothing is done to fix the field. Also, at this time any upgrades should be discussed with the contractor so they can give you a complete bid price.

You also should research and ask questions about the financial condition of the company. This is important because if your warranty is with this company, the warranty will only be as good as the company. If the company goes out of business, then you may lose your warranty.

Now that you have all the information, it is time to make the decision. In most cases, the decision will not be in your hands solely. A committee makes most of these types of decisions. The best thing is to let this group have all the information and then make the best choice.

Once the installation is completed, make sure the company gives you the contact information of the company or person that will do your warranty work or repair. You do not want to find out on the day of an event that the warranty repair person is two states away.

These suggestions are just guidelines to consider. You can always get information by contacting other Sport Field Managers and by referring to "A Guide to Synthetic and Natural Turfgrass for Sports Fields" released this January by the STMA. Just remember to plan for everything that you can, so that the installation goes smoothly, and you will have a great and safe playing surface.

*James Hlavaty is assistant groundskeeper at Paul Brown Stadium in Cincinnati; Darian Daily is head groundskeeper there, and a member of the STMA Board of Directors. ■*