



**Eric Schroder**  
Editor

[eschroder@m2media360.com](mailto:eschroder@m2media360.com)

717-805-4197  
P.O. Box 280,  
Dauphin, PA 17018

## Trusting science is right route

IN THIS ISSUE we provide an update on the latest published studies regarding any possible environmental or health problems associated with infill synthetic turf systems. Since no one can foresee with certainty into the future, we have to live with what is known today, and the methodology of scientific research is the most accurate measure available.

Some folks choose to focus on what is unknown, especially when it comes to their children—that is, to heck with the science, might those pieces of rubber be harming my little Emily or Jacob? To which a rational response is, dozens of studies by experts with no axe to grind in the debate have resulted in the same conclusions—at this time, there are no known dangers to people from playing on infilled synthetic turf (other than normal sports-related injuries of course).

In this month's article we look at three topics: heat, toxicity and MRSA (Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, aka "staph"). High temperatures on these surfaces isn't in dispute, though anecdotally some observers say that poorly maintained, hard packed dirt on fields can be just as hot.

Dr. Andy McNitt, associate professor of soil science at Penn State, is a nationally recognized authority on synthetic turf research and oversees a test plot on campus of various manufacturers' systems. He studied whether irrigating synthetic turf will cool it down and found that the heat transfer from the surface to the sole of an athlete's foot is significant enough to contribute to greater physiological stress that may result in serious heat-related health problems.

Some methods Dr. McNitt tried to reduce surface temps were initially successful in lowering the number to that of natural grass, but those lower temps couldn't be maintained for more than 3 hours. "Right now there is no effective and economically feasible way to lower the surface temperature of infilled synthetic turf," says Dr. McNitt. "Many are working on lots of ideas but I don't think anyone has solved it yet."

Regarding toxicity, current research has shown turf fibers (on new generation of fields rather than original AstroTurf products) are lead-free, do not leach, and that crumb rubber infill is neither ingestible nor inhalable. Both the states of New Jersey and New York cycled through the concerns and questions and arrived at "Let them play" decisions.

Darren Gill, director of marketing for FieldTurf, puts it succinctly: "Simply put, since the industry's early installs 15 years ago, no illness has ever been shown to be related to play on artificial turf."

As for MRSA, a growing problem in athletic environments, Dr. McNitt's latest work, from December 2008, concludes, "It should be noted that [staph] survival rate on a common turfgrass species used for athletic fields in the northern United States was comparable to the survival rate on synthetic turf when no disinfectants were applied."

See page 20 for details and links to full reports.

# SportsTurf

1030 W. Higgins Road  
Suite 230  
Park Ridge, IL 60068  
Phone 847-720-5600  
Fax 847-720-5601

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### STMA Office

805 New Hampshire Suite E

Lawrence, Ks 66044

Phone 800-323-3875 Fax 800-366-0391

Email [STMAinfo@STMA.org](mailto:STMAinfo@STMA.org)

[www.STMA.org](http://www.STMA.org)

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