

AVOID VOIDING your turf warranty



“I did what you told me to do!” That’s the best defense for any field manager faced with a warranty issue on a synthetic turf field. And the way for the manager to document that defense is to maintain a simple log book that lists dates of sweeping, brushing, infill replacement and other maintenance practices.

However, field managers at all levels agree that most companies—especially if they expect to be in business for the long term—will do the right thing by their customers. “Don’t stress about the letter of the law,” says Darian Daily, head groundskeeper at Paul Brown Stadium, home of the Cincinnati Bengals. By that, he means that a grounds crew should do what needs to be done to keep the field in good shape.

“Eight years ago, we were told we were to drag the field four times a year,” he recalls. Experience showed that more maintenance was needed and they have had no warranty issues as a result. “Don’t get too caught up in the letter of the law. For the most part, companies know you’ve got to do what you have to do.”

Still, it pays to cover your bases.

“They give you a manual. Go by it.”
— McNeal

“I keep a calendar log, day by day, of maintenance,” says Abby McNeal, CSFM,

director of turf management at Wake Forest University. If they sweep the field, she notes the date and whether the field was power swept or simply dragged. They note when the mound clay is spruced up, entering that job in the daily log along with all the other maintenance practices. That way, McNeal and Wake Forest have proof that they complied with the manufacturer’s warranty.

“Don’t stress about the letter of the law.”
— Daily

Daily has access to a computer-based work-order tracking system. The high-tech system is used to bill back expense items for every event at Paul Brown Stadium. “We have a work order when we clean the field, when we drag the field, or we make a repair,” Daily says. If there is a warranty issue, the computer prints out exactly what was done and when.

The standard warranty in the industry is for 8 years. Typically, the warranty that comes with the carpet covers two separate

things: durability and performance of the product, itself; and the installation of the product. Among the standard items guaranteed are that seams will remain adhered, that the inlays will remain in place and that the surface will remain playable.

Why 8 years? Good question. John Sorochan, co-director with Jim Brosnan at the Center for Safer Athletic Fields at the University of Tennessee, says warranties are typically based on lab tests focused on the life of the fiber...not the field’s use or location, or maintenance practices.

“Warranties always have been based on a hunch on how long the fiber will last,” Sorochan says. The Center is starting a program this fall to begin to quantify some of the myriad elements that go into field life. Until then, vendors and buyers will be stuck with traditional rule-of-thumb standards.

“Standard warranty,” however, does not mean “fixed in stone.” McNeal suggests that sports field managers read the warranty terms before buying. “If the warranty does not sound right for your situation, ask for

“Keep a log of what you do.”
— Cook

provisions to be put in or for the warranty to be adjusted for your situation,” she advises. Once you sign that paper, those are the terms that will rule any future discussion.

Keep in mind that you are dealing with a carpet that will be outdoors for a decade or so. It will be exposed to UV light that will break down the fibers. Depending on location, it will be subject to snow and ice or to pine needles and leaves. A typical warranty will cover issues like the fibers remaining in the backing and the field draining as specified.

That’s what the manufacturer promises. The city or college that owns the field has to do its bit, too. That means regular maintenance, by the book.

“We’ve never voided a warranty yet,” says Webb Cook, president of Sprinturf, King of Prussia, PA. “The best way for a manager to stay out of trouble is to follow at least the minimum protocol in the manual and be

able to say, 'I did what you told me to do.'"

Don't make a situation worse by "trying something." Stick to what the manual says. "When in doubt, it is best to contact the turf's manufacturer before rectifying any problem you feel could potentially affect the warranty," says Thomas Serensits, manager of Penn State's Sports Surface Research Center at University Park, PA.

Serensits emphasizes how important it is that the buyer be familiar with the terms of the warranty outlined by the manufacturer of their field. "General wear and tear is typically not covered by the warranty," he says. "When in doubt, contact the manufacturer."

The Tennessee Center began testing some basics this summer. "We are doing traction testing," Sorochan says. This means using live humans to execute 40-yard dashes, shuttle runs and zig-zag exercises to look at wear patterns. Sorochan emphasizes the need for some solid data.

"A common misconception is that these fields are maintenance-free." – Serensits

"Whenever there is an accident, it is always the field's fault—or the grounds staff's fault—never the shoe's fault or the athlete's fault," he says.

The Center hopes to quantify the multiple variables that effect fiber change and wear, rubber loss, traction and similar playability concerns. While the work will focus on conditions in Tennessee, it will provide a baseline for synthetic turf everywhere.

WORKING IT OUT

Every company in the business provides a maintenance manual with instructions on how to handle the field. Typically, it calls for weekly or bi-weekly drag brushing of the field during periods of heavy use. This will help keep the fiber from laying over, remove trash and redistribute the infill.

Next, Cook says, you get into maintenance of specific areas like the creases on lacrosse fields, the arc on a soccer field, or the

areas around the bases on a baseball diamond—places where the infill will be displaced and where it needs to be brushed back and replenished regularly.

"They give you a manual. Go by it," McNeal says. She notes that the manual covers everything from the ordinary to protecting the turf when it is necessary to take a bucket truck out on the field.

"A sports turf manager has to use their senses about it," she continues. "If something seems not quite right, call the manufacturer."

THE NEW BABY

All hands should be on deck when the field is turned over to the municipality or college. Before that, however, Cook likes to see the person responsible for regular maintenance at the job site every day.

"The maintenance guy should be there, watching what is done, to understand how the field was installed and how the product works," Cook says. "It is vital to have someone on the owner's side involved."

All good companies offer basic training in maintenance. Yet field managers will also learn from others in the business. For example, one of the benefits of artificial turf is that it becomes playable right after snow, if the snow is removed correctly. But it is incumbent on the field manager to know how to remove snow and ice properly so the field and its markings do not get torn up in the process.

"A common misconception is that these fields are 'maintenance-free'," Serensits says. Regular maintenance must be performed to maintain the safety and playability of a field. Common maintenance practices such as grooming, debris removal, and adding additional infill to heavy wear areas are a great start to maintaining these fields correctly, he adds.

Most installers or vendors are happy to leave extra infill to assure the city has the right material handy.

In addition, buyers should ask for a section of extra turf after the installation. Keep the extra piece outside (perhaps behind a maintenance building or on top of a press box). "By doing this, if a section of carpet must be replaced, the color of the carpet will match up because it is from the same batch and it has been exposed to the same amount

of sunlight," Serensits says. He also recommends having extra crumb rubber on site.

"In areas of high wear, such as sliding areas on baseball fields or lacrosse goal mouths, infill can be moved resulting in reduced infill depth," Serensits says. "Reintroducing rubber into these areas maintains the safety and playability of these areas."

"Then, keep a log of what you do," Cook advises. That way, you can validate the activities you did to keep the warranty valid and current.

MAKING A FIX

"Failures can occur because of a lack of maintenance," Serensits says. "I cannot stress enough the importance of regular maintenance on these surfaces."

Warranty issues never should devolve into a "did so – did not" conflict. Again, a simple log book will go a long way to validating a customer's compliance with required maintenance practices.

In Wake Forest's case, the field installed in October 2010 already is showing discoloration in the fibers around the sliding areas. Fibers are coming out in the batter's box.

"Wake Forest is adamant in getting the field we want," McNeal says, adding that the manufacturer has been quite open about working to a mutually satisfactory resolution of the problems.

The main warranty issues involve the carpet fiber, not workmanship.

At the moment, McNeal says, the issue is more a visual problem than one of playability...except in the batter's box. As soon as she saw the problem, she began to document it with photographs.

"The vendor has been on site every six weeks or so. They suggested a few extra maintenance practices. They want a mutual resolution and are standing behind their product," McNeal says. "They want to make Wake Forest happy about the field."

Daily says the only issues they have had are with fading of logo colors and some fiber breakdown and small depressions near the

hashes and numbers. From the stands, nobody would notice it.

"But if you walk the field, and we walk it all the time, you will see the numbers have broken down more than the field," Daily says. "It's only an eighth of an inch. But we want to be sure it is safe." Here is where some hard data from the Tennessee Center will come in handy.

Daily notes that the field at Paul Brown is entering its eighth season. That means it is near the end of its warranty life and, indeed, they expect to change out the field in 2012 at the end of the upcoming season.

"Fibers are the limiting factor," Daily says. "The fibers are wearing down and you can't afford a mis-step."

Daily, who is in regular contact with the synthetic field grapevine, says he believes the main warranty issues involve the carpet fiber, not workmanship.

"Reputable companies will always come back," he adds.

If there is a warranty issue, usually a city

or college will deal with the turf company, not the installer. The vendor will determine whether a repair is in order or whether some or all of the carpet must be replaced.

If there is a defect in the product, the customer has a right to expect replacement. If an inlay comes loose or the hash marks on the field come up, then a repair is reasonable.

Major issues, like a lack of drainage on a new field, are somewhat more complicated. Then it will be up to the vendor to determine if the cause is a lack of perforations in the carpet or whether the base stone was not set right.

DOWN THE ROAD

Researchers are in the process of gaining a better understanding of the performance of the yarns used by turf manufacturers. "At this point, that is still a work in progress as manufacturers tweak the characteristics of their yarns on a fairly regular basis," Serensits says.

Avoiding failures is an on-going project. Each field is different, so one solution does

A first step to avoiding failures is a quality installation.

not fit all. A first step to avoiding failures is a quality installation. Serensits says proper installation procedures during base construction and sewing/gluing seams will go a long way in reducing the chances for failures.

Eventually, research-based data will give manufacturers and turf managers the data they need to fully anticipate the life expectancy and wear history of a new synthetic turf.

Even then, however, it will behoove the turf manager to keep a maintenance log and add digital photos to document practices and problems...and thus avoid voiding the warranty. ■

Chris Harrison is a free lance writer who specializes in turf and agriculture.



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Building your personal brand in the sports turf industry

Your personal brand is the combination of your experience, skills and talents that distinguishes you from others who do the same work as you. This is very important when you are seeking and competing for another job. For those who are not in the job market, leveraging your personal brand is equally, if not more important. It helps you to increase your value to your employer, which results in greater opportunity for compensation and job security.

Like a retail brand, your personal brand encourages those who employ you to trust your ability to deliver quality field conditions within budget and on time. Your personal brand is a promise of what your employer can expect from you, so that when the unexpected happens—weather, pests, equipment failure—your personal brand is what saves you.

It's a given that you do a good job, but if you are not consistently telling or reminding people about the good job that you do, it is not top of mind. Your good work goes unrecognized. The perception others have of you can enhance or damage your career. Use these strategies to create a strong personal brand that establishes you as a professional and essential to the operational success of the sports facility.

Top ten personal brand-building strategies

Create a distinctive role for yourself. Answer the questions: "What is it that makes me different? What are my qualities, characteristics, greatest strengths, noteworthy traits that set me apart from my competitors or colleagues?"

Set goals and write them down. Goals enable you to chart a course to your destination.

Build on your strengths. Too often leaders spend a huge amount of time trying to shore up their weaknesses. Yes, weaknesses do deserve some acknowledgement and attention, but expanding on what you do well deserves the lion's share of time.

Associate with credible people. You are known by the company you keep. Embrace high ethical standards.

Be responsive. Return telephone calls and answer requests promptly, no matter how trivial they may seem.

Share the credit and rewards. Make others look good, but be the go-to person for new ideas and forward thinking.

Get involved in professional associations, industry organizations and your community. Write articles and speak for these organizations. These are great ways to enhance your visibility and let people experience your brand. Think of it as "career karma"—the more you give, the more you get in return.

Dress for success. "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society," Mark Twain said. This doesn't mean that coat and tie is status quo, but to wear appropriate attire for the occasion.

Impart business competence and pure professionalism. The image we project will form other people's opinions of you personally, and of the sports turf management profession.

Do a good job, do a good job, do a good job and then tell others about the good job you are doing. Do everything to the best of your ability. No amount of publicity or civic goodwill can overcome the perception that poor performance or shoddy ethics brings. ■

Kim Heck is chief executive officer of the Sports Turf Managers Association, www.stma.org.

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Lista de Seguridad y Mantenimiento de Los Campos de Fútbol y Fútbol Americano.

Antes de un entrenamiento o un juego, chequea que las siguientes características del campo juego cumplan con los requerimientos de seguridad. En el caso de que alguna de las situaciones de la lista de abajo no cumpla con lo requerido, márcala con la opción 'No (no se cumple)/Necesitan atención' y haz las modificaciones respectivas antes de permitir que los jugadores entren en el campo de juego. Si tu campo está experimentando problemas importantes, incluyendo un desgaste excesivo, problemas de drenaje, fallas de diseño, etc. ponte en contacto con la STMA al siguiente teléfono: 800-323-3875, o escribe a STMAinfo@STMA.org para que te deriven con los voluntarios STMA locales de tu área, quienes te darán algunos consejos.

Superficie de juego – todos los tipos

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Equipamiento de mantenimiento, tales como; rastrillos, mangueras, etc. han sido removidos del campo.
- La basura y los desechos peligrosos han sido retirados del campo de juego y de las áreas de espectadores y jugadores.
- Las cabezas de riego han sido instaladas según las recomendaciones del fabricante, sin protuberancias en la superficie de juego.
- Si tienes un sistema de riego automático, los tiempos de riego de las estaciones están programados de acuerdo a los horarios de los juegos.
- El campo fue construido de acuerdo a las especificaciones recomendadas por la industria.

Comentarios

Superficie de Juego – Césped Sintético

Si No/Necesitan atención

- No hay áreas muy usadas en el césped sintético (carpeta o alfombra).
- No hay rasgones o rajaduras en el material sintético.
- Las costuras están seguras.
- El material sintético no está abombado o inflado.
- Las fibras sintéticas están dispuestas hacia arriba.
- Hay material de relleno adecuado y está distribuido uniformemente.
- Hay agua disponible fácilmente para el lavado de fluidos indeseables.
- El calzado que está siendo usado por los jugadores es aceptable.

Comentarios

Arcos y los Postes de los Arcos

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Los postes de los arcos están derechos y anclados de manera segura.

Superficie de Juego – Césped Natural

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Hay a lo menos un 75 porciento de cobertura de césped en el campo.
- No hay áreas descubiertas con la superficie del suelo expuesta.
- El suelo tiene un buen drenaje, sin agua estancada en la superficie.
- El color, la altura y la densidad del césped son uniformes.
- El césped tiene un fuerte sistema de raíces, limitando el desarrollo.
- No hay malezas con espinas, cerdas o pelos.
- No hay hoyos o montículos hechos por topos, tuzas u otro animal.
- No existen surcos o trincheras causadas por el uso de la maquinaria o por el uso excesivo del campo.
- Ha habido comunicación entre el personal de mantenimiento, el entrenador y por las personas que usan las instalaciones.

Comentarios

- Los postes están adecuadamente acolchados.
- El cemento que afirma los postes de los arcos está por debajo de la superficie.
- No hay bordes afilados, protuberancias o fracturas en los arcos.
- Los arcos están anclados de forma segura.
- Todos los pernos, tornillos y conexiones de los arcos están intactos y bien apretados.

Comentarios

Marcación del Campo de juego

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Si es un campo multiuso, las líneas están Yes: o o Las líneas son brillantes.
- Las líneas están correctamente marcadas por la maquinaria adecuada.

Comentarios

Fuera de los Límites del Campo/ Áreas de Transición

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Hay un mínimo de 25 pies alrededor del campo de juego para que los jugadores corran con seguridad fuera de los límites del campo.
- Hay un mínimo de 50 pies entre los campos (si es un complejo multiuso)
- Todos los sumideros de agua están cubiertos adecuadamente.
- El área de transición hacia la pista está fácilmente identificable y nivelada.

Comentarios

Lista de Seguridad y Mantenimiento de Los Campos de Fútbol y Fútbol Americano.

Mallas divisoras

(Si tu campo no tiene mallas divisoras, omite esta sección)

Si No/Necesitan atención

- Las mallas divisoras están instaladas de forma segura en el campo.


- Los postes de las mallas divisoras están fuera del área de juego.
- No hay bases de cemento expuestas sobre el suelo.
- Las mallas divisoras están perfectamente acopladas a los postes.
- No hay grandes espacios en las mallas divisoras o entre estas y el suelo.
- Los cables de tensión en la parte alta y baja de la malla están instalados en una parte segura del campo de juego.
- Los extremos de los cables en las mallas no están expuestos en la punta o en las esquinas.
- No hay áreas dañadas que sobresalgan, estén afiladas o sueltas.

Comentarios

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Iluminación

(Si tu campo no tiene iluminación, omite esta sección)

Si **No/Necesitan atención**

- la iluminación ha sido instalada/inspeccionada por un ingeniero o técnico calificado.
- Todas las luces están funcionando.
- El haz de luz es adecuado y cubre uniformemente el campo.
- La iluminación de los focos de pie cumple con las especificaciones recomendadas por la industria.

Comentarios

Gradas/Instalaciones

(si tu campo no tiene gradas ni otras instalaciones, omite esta sección)

Si **No/Necesitan atención**

- Las tuercas y tornillos están bien apretados y en un número suficiente.

General

Si **No/Necesitan atención**

- Existe una bandera u otro sistema de señalización para avisar a los jugadores que deben abandonar el campo si las inclemencias del tiempo u otro peligro es inminente.

Comentarios

- Las barandas son seguras y están en su lugar.
- Los extremos de la alfombra sintética están en un lugar seguro.
- No hay áreas desgastadas o muy usadas. (wooden bleachers)
- No hay protuberancias peligrosas o puntas afiladas.
- La instalación y localización de tarros de basura es adecuada.
- Hay letreros apropiados que dan a conocer a los jugadores y al público en general; las reglas, el apropiado comportamiento y las condiciones deficientes.
- Hay teléfonos públicos o una oficina de administración en caso de emergencia.
- Las áreas que están en reparaciones están identificadas y señalizadas apropiadamente.

Comentarios



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Notes from STMA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

THE 2011 STMA SOUTHEAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN KNOXVILLE, TN June 15-16 included tours of the softball and soccer complex at the University of Tennessee as well as “walk-the-field” tours of 102,455-seat Neyland Stadium and Lindsey Nelson Stadium, where the Volunteer baseball team plays. That tour included the Vols’ football indoor practice facility that larger than many airplane hangars, and the locker rooms, workout facilities and recruiting centers for both facilities.

The event also included a 3-hour outdoor trade show on the site of the University’s new Center for Athletic Field Safety (CAFS), where attendees got up close and personal with products of 31 exhibitors, including some equipment test drives.

Dr. John Sorochan, associate professor of turfgrass science at Tennessee and Director of the CAFS, and doctoral student Adam Thoms introduced attendees to the Center, which includes 60 30 x 15-foot “mini-football” plots that include every type of synthetic field in use today as well as natural turf species on native soil, sand build-up and sand-cap bases. Sorochan said they will be testing in field conditions, looking not only at traffic issues but also injuries, specifically studying the interactions between turf and cleats (and other shoe types), and also will be monitoring environmental conditions under the surfaces.

Thoms said they plan to treat turf plots as any turf manager would, and that studies would include stormwater runoff. “We will be looking at what is coming off the fields,” Sorochan said. “And collecting water samples to see what’s in it.”

The Center officially opened July 13 and is partially funded by AstroTurf’s \$3.5 million donation.

Dr. Grady Miller of North Carolina State and Eric Fasbender, CSFM, of LSU presented on field painting. Miller has been studying paint and its effects on turf. He said

for example that red paint reduces photosynthesis by 75%, which is “like shade.” He cited data regarding testing the red and white colors of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) logo that showed “an amazing difference between the two colors” regarding turf recovery.

Miller said the worst colors for turf are black, “Duke” blue, and garnet. His studies



>> THIS IS A BAG OF DEBRIS collected from the turf at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, IN home of the NFL’s Colts. It was on display at the Regional Conference by Jacob Maynard of FieldGroomers; part of his business is cleaning synthetic surfaces.

are continuing and will turn to application techniques and making colors using other colors in the spectrum.

Miller said an airless sprayer can pay for itself because it can be used on surfaces other than turf such as to line parking lots though he knows aerosol is still used extensively, especially at the high school level. Miller said the chemistries in both airless and aerosol paints are similar for testing purposes.

Fasbender said he verticuts his endzones in Baton Rouge and his logo areas after each season to help get out some of the built-up paint out of the rootzone. He said the light reflection/absorption of your field paint color can make a difference in your paint choice; he said the purple endzone always

comes back faster than the yellow endzone at Tiger Stadium.

He emphasized that to keep your airless sprayer functioning properly it must be cleaned regularly. Another tip was gluing guards on your stencils to hold them up and not crush any grass. And he said keeping aerosol paint as a back up is smart, especially if you need to apply in light rain.

COVERS

Dr. Mike Goatley of Virginia Tech and incoming president of the STMA, and Jesse Pritchard, CSFM, sports turf manager for the University of Virginia, presented on turf covers. They held up examples as they discussed different types of cover material and different uses for each. A lightweight and popular design was shown as Goatley said it lets in 65% sunlight but can still keep the ground moist if you’re growing in after a renovation or seeding. These were not recommended as winter protective covers however.

A geotextile design was a heavier cover that will normally stay in place easily; their orange-colored version is known as a good color for turf growth. Goatley said if you keep Kentucky bluegrass under this cover the grass will be green but you will pay a “post-cover syndrome” price.

Another cover, a woven polypropylene, is not a rain tarp but works the same way since it prevents moisture from getting to your turf.

Goatley said one of the best uses for covers is traffic management. “If you put down a tarp, you will keep people off your field,” he said, noting that tarps are often on in northern Virginia from November through March.

In fall, he said you need at least 50% sunlight to get through your turf cover and that dark-colored covers aren’t good for growing later in the season. In spring when you want the sun to get through is another time to use the lighter covers. ■