

# From the Sidelines



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## Five trends in sports turf

**I**F I NEVER HEAR “POLL NUMBERS” AGAIN IT’LL BE TOO SOON. The combination of the media’s need for content and all the data being produced by surveys of too many people on too many topics overwhelms my senses and I usually ignore the results. Here are some decidedly non-scientific results from a one-man survey\* on trends in sports turf:

**High expectations:** Everywhere you look there are high-definition televisions and sports mean great ratings. When’s the last time you dined out where there wasn’t a game on TV available, at least at the bar? And lots of people have HD at home. All those viewers see top-end fields in high-definition every game. This is raising standards locally (sometimes without a corresponding appreciation for good maintenance). Many more turf managers should expect to encounter a higher bar for field appearance AND improved playability.

**Government debt.** Another numbers trend is toward governments looking to spend less money in a time of record government deficits, which seem to be an ever-looming threat of budget cuts in parks & rec departments. Most states are also looking at cutbacks in education spending that will affect higher ed and K-12 districts. Private resources are providing more cash for school athletic programs every year; perhaps fundraising will become part of the curriculum in turf classes.

**Safety.** The National Football League is very popular and therefore influential. The NFL’s recent focus on keeping players safe regarding head injuries and concussions has the nation asking, “How safe is our favorite game?” No doubt that field hardness will continue to be of concern to turf managers for all sports. This new attention to concussions hopefully will lead to better standards nationwide. Measuring hardness and keeping records also might turn into more budget to keep surfaces safe as possible.

**More synthetic fields.** Google news feeds do not lie when it comes to what’s in the news and synthetic turf fields are proof. Hundreds of communities across the US are investigating, seeking funding for, and building synthetic turf fields because they are durable and possible moneymakers through rentals and tournaments.

In addition, many fields built when the infill generation began are now 8 years old and older, and their reclamation, reuse, and/or related problems replacing them will be affecting many more communities.

**Water.** Preserving water and making conscientiously green decisions about water is not only common sense and good business but also a duty for turf managers. Educating yourself to save water at work could look pretty good on your review, too.

Water-saving practices and equipment will continue to improve but are turf managers doing their best?

\*No robocalls were conducted in connection with this survey. ■

### Correction

In our article from the October issue, “Three keys to managing high traffic, high quality athletic fields,” there was an error in the ninth paragraph on page 10. The author intended to say “Soil organic matter can serve as an important source of carbon and nitrogen as it decomposes over time.” We regret the error.

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