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Photo courtesy: Sharyn Luke

# Sideline Solutions

**Have questions? Send them  
to Dave at: ISU, Hort. Dept.,  
Ames, IA 50011.**

by Dr. Dave Minner

*The turf on the sideline area is basically gone halfway through the season. The coaches and players are constantly standing in mud and water. What would you recommend as a permanent solution?*

*We are looking at a concrete pad covered by artificial turf. We want it to be safe for the players, and of course, as inexpensive as possible. We have a native-soil field with slow internal drainage, but a good surface crown.*

- Patrick W. Mrnsy

Norfolk, NE

## Reading your sideline wear pattern

Sideline areas are usually a disaster. They're often neglected because they are located out-of-bounds.

In fact, the officials' area, coaching box, and team area are three distinct areas that should be marked for each event. Strictly enforcing activity in these designated areas will make the game safer and reduce deterioration of turf immediately adjacent to the sideline.

Between the 25-yard lines, collegiate rules require a six-foot boarder adjacent to the sideline for the officials, followed by a six-foot box for the coaches, followed by a 12-foot area for the team and support staff. The officials often designate a "get back guy" to keep players and coaches out of the officials' box.

Coaches like their box marked out as well, so they can keep the team out of the way. The head coach is seldom removed from the officials' area, but others are justifiably removed.

A wear pattern immediately adjacent to the sideline indicates a lack of discipline by the coach, since the team is allowed to freely wander the sidelines. A noticeable wear pattern that starts 12 feet from the sideline indicates good coaching and a well-disciplined team.

Adhering to the rules makes sidelines a safer impact area. It improves sideline field conditions and costs nothing. A few flags at the beginning of each football season could go a long way toward keeping personnel in their proper place and improving conditions on the sidelines.

With some polite explanation, most coaches will jump at the chance to keep their designated area free of unnecessary players. Emphasize that it is important to restrict activity in the 12-foot safe zone around the field.

Sideline tarps made of heavy geotextile can also be duct-taped to the grass to further reduce trampling in the team area. Use heavy tarps made specifically for sideline areas. Lightweight substitutes don't protect the field, and they often become a trip hazard.

Prevent water ponding by maintaining an adequate surface slope away from the bench area. The sideline area will require routine coring, topdressing, and seeding/sodding to prevent ponding in depressed areas.

Personally, I prefer to have a natural-grass sideline, but sometimes the area turns to mud because there are simply too many games. French drains and open-grate drains with synthetic-turf covers can help remove surface water from the sideline area, but even rapid-draining, sand-based fields lose their sideline areas to team trampling when the surface is slightly wet and spongy.

Fields that host several schools and multiple games during the week often benefit from permanent synthetic sideline areas. Permanent sideline synthetics on football fields should be avoided when the field will be expanded for soccer. When the decision has been made to install a permanent sideline synthetic, it is very important to use high-quality materials and installation methods.

AstroTurf [(800) 723-8873] specifically markets materials for entire

playing fields and permanent sideline areas. The sideline construction basically consists of an asphalt base covered by a rubber pad and synthetic turf. When properly installed, the synthetic turf is stretched over the asphalt and attached to a framing board along the edge, so that there is a flush surface between the natural grass and the artificial turf.

I have observed many homemade surfaces that become very dangerous and seldom have any warranty. A common type of homemade surface consists of indoor/outdoor carpet placed directly over a concrete pad.

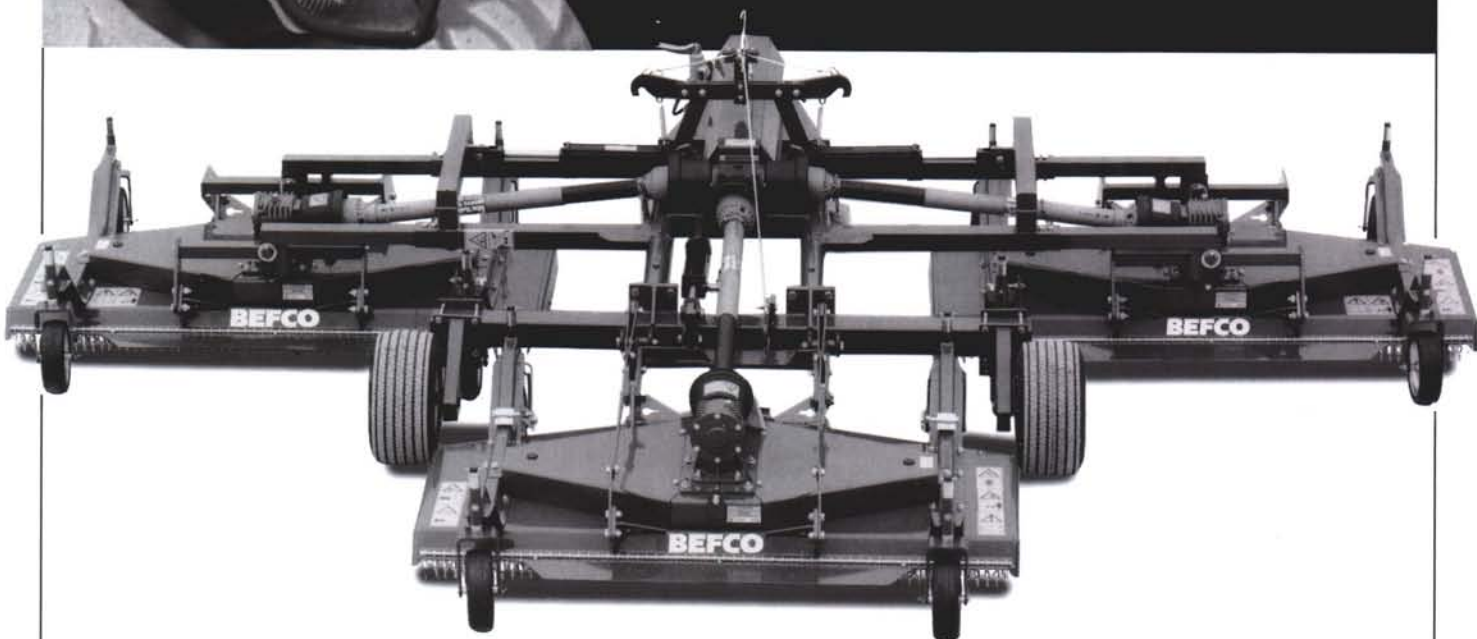
Even when permanent sideline areas are installed properly, routine maintenance will be required to insure that the surface transition from grass to turf remains smooth.

## Where do I place the sideline tarp or permanent surface?

I have seen both bench tarps and artificial turf placed anywhere from zero to 12 feet from the sideline. Officials often request that the tarp be placed outside of their area (six feet from the sideline). If the officials' area and coaches' area are used properly, both the bench tarp and the artificial turf can be placed six to 12 feet from the sideline. Artificial-turf areas are typically 120 feet long by 15 to 20 feet wide and, cost approximately \$6 to \$8 per square foot. □

*David D. Minner, Ph.D., is an associate professor with the Department of Horticulture at Iowa State University. He serves on STMA's Certification Committee. Send your questions to Dave at: ISU, Hort. Dept., Ames, IA 50011; or call: (515) 294-2751, fax: (515) 294-0730, or e-mail: dminner@iastate.edu.*

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