



What Lies Beneath

For many years, synthetic turf fields were sold as low-maintenance — or even no-maintenance — alternatives to natural grass. Over time, especially as infill systems rose in prominence, manufacturers and facility owners became savvier about these surfaces' special needs (see "High Fiber Diet," Nov. 2005, p. 84). But recent events have demonstrated that much can be hidden within the polyethylene and/or nylon blades of synthetic surfaces.

"I could supply a cheerleading squad for 10 years with bobby pins," says Milo George, general manager of McComb, Ohio-based Professional Sports Field Services LLC, which cleans, refurbishes and repairs turf fields. "We find lots of cleat spikes; we find jewelry. We have found sheet-metal screws, things that I have no idea why they're on the field. Most of all, we collect lots of dust, dirt and lint. And all of it contributes to wear and compaction."

In a year that has seen growing recognition of the threat of MRSA to athletes and a highly publicized turf-toxicity scare, the time would seem ripe for greater understanding of the potential for harmful objects and substances to collect in turf. Instead, the investigation of lead chromate in turf fibers was met with some industry denial of the possibility that fibers could break down into significant amounts of dust — something that, for George, was the last straw. Within days of *AB's* report on the latest turf wars (see "Lead Astray?" Aug., p. 32), George had posted pictures on his company's

web site of piles of detritus removed from fields.

"I've been accused of fear-mongering," he says. "I'd held on to those pictures for a long time — but then I knew that people would be interested to see a typical field and the amount of fine broken fibers, trash, dirt and dust we get out of these things."

Lead content, George says, is not a topic that, as someone who works closely with turf manufacturers, he's interested in talking about. "I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole," he says. "Just the dust and dirt is enough — it doesn't make for a good environment."

JUNK DRAWER
A magnet bar (top photo) can be used to pull a variety of debris out of synthetic turf.





PILING ON
A surprising amount of broken fibers, dirt and dust can collect within synthetic turf systems.

The reality is that as these fields get old, things start breaking down — **if you want your fields to last long, you have to take care of them.**

Professional Sports Field Services' collection techniques are non-aggressive, so as not to abrade fibers. The company performs a sweep with the same type of magnet bar that roofing companies use to rid yards of nails after a roof replacement, carefully decompacts the field surface and then uses brooms and vacuums to remove debris. (The proper method for getting rid of dust while leaving the lion's share of crumb rubber in place is a closely held secret.) George says his photos not only show how much debris is discovered, but also suggest how easily bits of turf can be turned loose into the environment. To doubters, he tells an anecdote about a high school athletic director who catches goldbricking assistants napping on the field by telltale green fibers on the backs of their jackets.

"Nobody can deny there's dirt and dust all over these fields," George says. "The point is not to criticize turf manufacturers, because they're doing a good job. But the reality is that as these fields get old, things start breaking down — if you want your fields to last long, you have to take care of them."

It all comes down to "good housekeeping," he says, including weekly, monthly and annual maintenance. "I've talked to schools that had to replace their fields in six years," George says. "That should not be. They should be able to get a few more years out of their fields."

— Andrew Cohen

THE SCORE

4,298,543

Attendance drawn in 2008 by the New York Yankees, a franchise record, in the team's final season at 85-year-old Yankee Stadium

4,293,000

Maximum regular-season attendance the Yankees will be able to draw at the new Yankee Stadium

21

Amount, in millions of dollars, for which New York City appraised the value of the land under the new Yankee Stadium

204

Amount, in millions of dollars, that New York City told the Internal Revenue Service the land was worth

53

Percentage rise over the past three years in travel costs reimbursed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association to its championship participants (see p. 80)

1.5

Amount, in millions of dollars, that the NCAA expects to save in championship reimbursements each year by limiting participating schools to two bags per traveler

18

Inches allotted per spectator sitting on bleachers in the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium, the University of Mississippi's Vaught-Hemingway Stadium and the University of Colorado's Folsom Field

17.2

Width, in inches, of the average American man's hips in 2000, the last year for which statistics are available

19.7

Width, in inches, of the average American woman's hips in 2000

SOURCES:

- 1-2. THE NEW YORK TIMES
- 3-4. NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
- 5-6. THE INDYSTAR
- 7-9. OMAHA WORLD-HERALD