

Key scope of maintenance works required for long pile (3G) artificial turf pitch

Introduction

Over the past 10 years an increasing number of artificial turf pitches have been installed in Hong Kong – they are an excellent option given our climate and high usage demands, and also provide a high return on investment. However, although looking after artificial pitches is far easier than trying to maintain a natural turf surface, it is important to remember that 3G pitches are NOT “maintenance free” – it is in fact essential to regularly carry out a proper quality maintenance schedule by skilled individuals with the right equipment in order to provide a top quality safe and hygienic surface for all players to enjoy.

The Hong Kong Rugby Union has been installing and utilising artificial turf pitch since 2003, and we have learnt that good maintenance practice will allow you to maximise the pitch’s life expectancy with its designed performance standards as measured by World Rugby and FIFA certification, while poor practice leads to rapid deterioration and potentially dangerous and unpleasant surface to play on.

Below are some simple tips for long pile artificial turf pitches –this is not a comprehensive list, and pitch owners should always seek guidance from the respective artificial turf supplier to formulate their own maintenance programme which suits their individual needs. The HKRU highly recommends that these tips and guidelines are introduced in all cases where artificial pitches are used.

Scope of maintenance works

Daily tasks

1.) Debris removal

Clear all debris especially leaves promptly to prevent debris from migrating into the system, inhibiting drainage, causing infill compaction, and hence weakening the shock absorption. The surface debris can be blown to edge of the field, and then be collected by hand / plastic rake.

Weekly tasks

1.) Weeds removal

The root of the weeds could cause infill compaction. Remove the weeds by hand, or consider the use of herbicide should a constant supply of weeds be found (Note: Approval from artificial turf supplier should be sought prior to applying any chemicals).

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2.) Inspect high wear areas (such as penalty spot, corner kick area)

It is important to keep the correct infill level to keep the pile standing upright. Excessive exposed pile can be easily flattened and cause a range of problems such as skin burns, low grip, reduced permeability, etc. Always refill your infill material to the recommended depth and evenly distribute the material by brush.

3.) Inspect lines and seams

Depending on which artificial turf supplier you use, the pitch lines and the artificial turf strips could be either glued in place or stitched together. In both cases the joints will naturally be worn out over time, but an open joint could also be found at an earlier stage due to poor workmanship or the installation works (glue method) being carried out during wet weather. An open joint can create a tripping hazard and you should call up the artificial turf supplier to repair it at once.

Tasks subject to usage

1.) Groom the surface

Regular brushing helps maintain uniform infill levels and keeps the pile upright. It also helps to remove debris and optimise the turf appearance. There are several methods and types of equipment that can be used to brush artificial turf pitches - pitch owners should ask their artificial turf supplier for the recommended grooming method, frequency, direction of brushing, brush height setting, etc.

Subject to usage, grooming may be required weekly / bi-weekly / monthly.

2.) Refilling the infill (whole pitch)

The infill could be washed away by inclement weather, or gradually removed over time by pitch users.

Subject to usage, refilling of the infill might be required yearly or bi-yearly (Note: a newly installed pitch might require an infill top-up within 3-6 months after the infill “settles down”).

Room 2001, Olympic House, 1 Stadium Path, So Kon Po, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

香港銅鑼灣掃桿埔大球場徑一號奧運大樓二〇〇一室

Tel 電話: (852) 2504 8311 Fax 傳真: (852) 2576 7237 E-mail 電郵: info@hkrugby.com Website 網址: hkrugby.com

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3.) Surface de-compaction by deep grooming

Inevitably the playing surface will become hardened and more compacted even with regular grooming, therefore specialised equipment, usually a tine rake with adjustable height, should be used to penetrate and de-compact the infill from time to time.

Subject to usage, surface de-compaction might be required every six months or quarterly (Note: Surface de-compaction should be carried out by a well-trained individual or artificial turf supplier as miss-use of de-compaction equipment may irreversibly damage the artificial turf backing).

Misc.

1.) Cleaning by irrigation

Irrigation will help reduce the build up of any levels of pollution since the pollutants are generally hydrophobic. Spraying a surfactant, essentially a “soap” that coats the pollutant enabling it to be washed away, in advance could greatly enhance the efficacy of watering. Pitch owners should ask their artificial turf supplier to recommend a suitable surfactant.

The cleaning operation should only be necessary after a period of prolonged dry weather that will see the concentrations of pollutants increase. During the rainy season the pollutants in the atmosphere are reduced and the surface is naturally regularly cleaned by the rain.

2.) Correct footwear

Where possible encourage the pitch users to wear studded boots instead of flat soles as this will reduce the wear on the fibres. Metal spikes should be prohibited.

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