Weed and Grass Encroachment

This position paper is meant to be informational with respect to the potential for problems associated with weed and grass encroachment on existing running tracks which surround natural turf infields. It is not uncommon to experience grass shoots emerging from synthetic running track surfaces if the surface itself is of porous design and if a number of other conditions are present.

Understanding why weed growth is present is important. Weeds are prolific seed producers. Seeds are transported by wind, water, animal, mechanical and human means. Tracking grass clippings onto a track surface during the mowing operation is an example of mechanical means. Transported seeds can, and do, find their way into the pores of base mat/structural spray-type resilient track surface where they settle into protected little pockets and often come into contact with soil nutrients that have been deposited by similar means. Moisture is introduced with rainfall and in some cases automated sprinkling systems. It should be noted that older tracks which have been “resurfaced” are slightly less porous, not so as to eliminate entry points for seed and dirt but enough so that the track surface itself does not tend to dry out, at least as quickly as if it were a newly installed porous system. This is significant because during an usually wet season, the pores are continuously damp, providing optimal conditions for weed growth.

A strategy should be developed to address the problem if it occurs or if it is reasonable to expect it to persist, especially during wet years. Recent herbicide sensitive constraints have drastically reduced and/or eliminated the use of historically effective weed killing agents, further complicating the situation. Nonetheless, a strategy must be developed.

Suggestions to consider are as follows:

1. Educate people, especially maintenance personnel, as to the source of the problem.
2. Take a proactive approach to minimize the potential for seed migration. Close examination of the mowing process could be a good place to start.
4. Perform regular inspections of your facility to define weed problems at the outset.
5. Draw up a battle plan for killing or removing existing unwanted weed growth. This might include a combination of mechanical control (hand removal of the larger weed sprouts) and regular spot spray applications.
6. Seek to further enhance your strategies by conferring with other school district maintenance departments, parks department maintenance personnel and others who may share similar maintenance responsibilities.

As was stated, weed encroachment and the presence of unwanted weed growth is not uncommon with regard to existing porous running track facilities which are surrounded by natural turf fields. If you see some grass growing on your surface, it is growing in the surface of the running track, not from beneath it. Proper understanding, research and the adoption of a plan designed to control and minimize unwanted weed growth are the keys to controlling this problem on your running track facility.

*Differences in site, weather and soil conditions require variations in construction and repair methods and materials. Readers are advised to consult an ASBA Certified Track Builder, a design professional with experience in designing sports facilities or a qualified contractor before undertaking construction or repair of a running track facility.

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