



**PENN STATE**

**CENTER FOR SPORTS SURFACE RESEARCH**

## **From the Field: How to conduct a pregame field inspection**

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*Welcome to From the Field - A Guide to Athletic Field Safety and Care.*

*Throughout this series, we will focus on a sometimes overlooked but critical component affecting the safety and performance for athletes of all ages – the playing surface.*

*Our goal is to provide you with simple, helpful tips about playing conditions that maximize both safety and performance.*

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With everything involved in preparing for a football game, inspecting your field may not be No. 1 on your pregame priority list. However, routine field inspections can reduce injury risk by identifying and correcting potential hazards before the players hit the field.

The NFL now mandates that fields be inspected prior to all games with each field manager required to submit an official report following the inspection. This month's column will guide you through the field inspection process and provide other tips to help reduce potential field hazards.

### **Inspecting synthetic turf fields**

If you have a synthetic turf field, there are several potential hazards requiring regular inspection. The first is carpet seams.

Properly functioning (non-separating) seams do not pose an elevated risk. However, if the seams begin to fail and separate, they create potential tripping hazards.

When a synthetic turf field is installed, large sections of carpet are rolled across the width of the field. These carpet pieces are five yards wide and extend completely across the field.

As a result, there generally is a seam on every 5-yard line. However, that is not always the case.

In addition to the seams going across the field, there are seams at each inlay. Inlays are colored pieces of carpet used to create numbers, hash-marks and logos.

Seams should be inspected on a regular basis for separation. The NFL field inspection guidelines state that any seam that has separated more than 3 mm should be remediated according to the field manufacturer's recommendations.

Particular attention should be paid to complex logos that contain many small inlays as these contain many seams and often are located at the highly used center of the field. Again, be sure to follow the field manufacturer's recommendations for repair.

Wrinkles in synthetic turf can sometimes develop over time. Wrinkles can create another tripping hazard, so follow the field manufacturer's recommendations for repair.

The field should be free of any foreign objects and debris such as garbage, leaves, etc. Blowers and sweepers specifically designed for synthetic turf can help clean the field prior to the game.

Check high-use areas of the field for depressions. If the field is also used for lacrosse, keep an eye on the goal mouth areas. Lacrosse goal mouths are notorious for crumb rubber infill displacement and resulting depressions.

If holes and depressions are found, additional crumb rubber infill should be used to fill them in. Infill loss can be a significant problem and will be addressed in more detail in an upcoming From the Field column.

Goal posts should be checked ensure they are properly anchored. Goal post pads should be installed for all games.

Be sure to inspect sideline areas for obstacles such as trash can and benches. These types of items should be far enough away from the playing surface that a player has a chance to stop before coming into contact with them. A minimum buffer zone of 25 feet is commonly recommended.

If the field has been used for any non-football events, such as a graduation, walk the field and look for nuts, bolts, screws, nails or any materials that may have been used in construction of the stage or a similar structure.

The amount of metal debris that is sometimes found on fields can be both surprising and dangerous. In the NFL, field managers must go over the field with a large magnet after events such as concerts to remove metal debris. Magnets capable of being pulled by utility carts are available for purchase and are a useful tool if your field regularly hosts non-football events.

### **Inspecting natural grass fields**

While there are no seams to worry about like on synthetic turf fields (unless the field was recently sodded), there are a number of potential hazards that require attention on natural grass fields.

Holes and depressions can increase injury risk and should be filled in as soon as possible using sand and/or soil. When time allows, the area should be preferably sodded if it is large or, at a minimum, the area should be seeded as soon as possible.

Be on the lookout for any debris and/or foreign objects such as metal helmet accessories and nails used to string out the field during the painting process.

If the field has an in-ground irrigation system, check that all sprinkler heads have fully retracted below the surface as designed and that any quick-coupler or other valves have been removed and valve caps have been properly placed in the closed position.

Just as with synthetic turf fields, goal posts and sideline areas should be inspected, and potential obstacles should be moved away from the immediate sideline area to create a buffer zone. After non-football events, the field should be checked for metal debris as previously described in the synthetic turf section.

### **Use a checklist**

A field inspection checklist is a great way to be sure to not overlook any elements of your field inspection. It also provides a record that the field was inspected should an injury occur and the safety of the field be questioned.

You can make your own checklist or use one that has already been created. The Sports Turf Managers Association has created a thorough field checklist that is available [here](#).

Routine field inspections demonstrate a proactive approach to athlete safety. Follow the NFL's lead by performing regular field inspections, and you will help reduce injury risk.