

Athletic Field Maintenance

A General Guide for Fields



- For coaches and volunteers dedicated to providing safe, sustainable playing surfaces for baseball & softball.



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**IF YOUR SHOE LEAVES AN
IMPRESSION LIKE THESE,**

**FIELD IS TOO WET AND SHOULD
REMAIN
CLOSED**



A: Field Playability Policy

Determining Playability

Determining to play on athletic fields is a crucial decision impacting the conditions and sustainability of a field. Fields are closed to avoid injury and damage to players and to the playing surface. Choosing to play on a wet field or the vigorous attempt to dry a wet field are major reasons fields are damaged.

Town Policy

The Parks Department at its discretion may close a field for the purpose of maintenance, safety or any other reason deemed appropriate for the management or protection of the field and its patrons. Most typically, under inclement weather, Monday through Friday maintenance staff makes such decisions prior to 2:45 PM. The information is available to the public by 3 PM. Field Closed signs: These signs include both the infield and outfield play areas. When posted, the entire field is closed.

On Saturday-Sunday, there is very limited staff present in the parks and the shift is very early to meet the demand of early start times for games. The maintenance crew will prioritize the fields schedule so that the attempt can be made to open as many fields as possible without losing time on one particular field. **The fields will be addressed in an order that is based on field condition and the crew's knowledge of each field and its ability to drain.** Field preparation is not the only responsibility of the weekend crew so clubs are not permitted to hold up and delay the crew at any particular field.



The Parks Department uses various criteria to determine field playability. Criteria include:



- There is standing water on any portion of the field.
- The sound of a footstep (squish-squash) can be heard while walking the field.
- While standing on the field, water can be observed gathering around the sole of the foot.
- While walking the infield areas an impression 1/2" or deeper is made in the clay.

On the weekends, if the maintenance crew has gone for the day and the weather clears for the afternoon, Club Officials may contact the following members of the Recreation Commission to have them visit the field and determine whether the field can be opened.

Jim Hackett 310-9134 cell

Joe Falcone 760-4967 cell

If you have questions regarding specific fields, instruct your club field coordinators to contact the Assistant Superintendent so that the maintenance crew can be reach for status of fields.

Field Playability Policy Cont.

At times Club Officials are expected to make field playability decisions. This includes weekday evenings if there has been precipitation after 3:00 PM. The same criteria should be used as the Parks Department when determining playability.

For the protection of your players and for the protection of the playing surface, if the fields are too wet to use SAFELY, do not use them. Chances are very good that if you use a field when wet, damage will prevent it from being usable the next day.

If your shoe leaves an impression 1/2 " deep, field is TOO wet for play!

B: Water Removal Techniques

Water removal should only be done to dry the field. It should not be done with the expectation that the field will be readily playable. Puddles form because the clay mix and/or grass areas are saturated through to the subgrade. There are many factors that influence the field surfaces ability to dry out. **It's important to note that once the subgrade is saturated the fields needs time to dry.**

Brooming: Never broom the water by pushing it into the grass or toward the edge of the arc. The water should be spread out over the infield mix. When dispersing the water, avoid pushing. Try to pull the water. This will allow better control of the broom and help to avoid creating low spots.

*It is highly recommended that you **DO NOT** broom puddles.*

Use a rake to loosen the wet material and scarify the infield mix to accelerate drying. If you are raking near the edge of the infield grass, avoid pushing the infield mix close to the edge. You do not want to create lips when moving material. If the muddy material doesn't dry, than the field should be closed.

Hand Pumping can be used to remove puddles. Dig a small hole in the lowest point of the wet area in order to maximize water removal as it drains to the lowest point. Once full, dispose of the water outside the field of play. Remember to fill in your holes and rake to level the area and accelerate drying potential of the infield mix.

Puddle Pillows: For shallow puddles you may drop a Puddle Pillow into the area and allow it to absorb the water. Have a bucket handy to drain the pillow. Empty the bucket outside the play area.

After removing standing water, rake the area to scarify the infield mix so it will dry more quickly. You may try dragging the area as well. All wet areas need time to dry.

Tips:

Avoid Brooming puddles.

Do not sweep puddles into the grass areas.

Do not remove the infield mix from the field.

Do not dump collected water back into the playing area.

Do rake areas to scarify and turn over infield mix to accelerate drying.

C: Use of Drying Agents

Drying Agent: The use of a drying agent is to accelerate drying for playability. However, drying agent should be used sparingly. This drying material should not be applied in excess as it can change the texture of the infield mix and hinder drainage paths and slow percolation rates.

RULE: No more than 4 bags of drying agent are permitted. If more is needed than the field should be closed. One bag per base is the rule of thumb.

When using the drying agent, pour the agent evenly into the wet area of the infield mix. Do not use the agent in the grass areas. Allow the agent a few minutes to soak up the water. Use a rake to turn over the drying agent and infield mix so that it works into the areas and breaks up the muddy material.

No more than 4 bags
of Drying Agent
should be used. If
more is needed, it's
TOO
Wet!

D: Grass Edge and Infield Maintenance



When maintaining the infield, avoid dragging within 6 inches from the edge. This will avoid allowing the build up of material and creating “lips” along the edge areas. It is best to rake along side these areas by hand. Any time a “lip” develops where the grass meets the infield mix, a stiff broom can be used to brush the material back into the clay area or a hose can be used to wash the clay mix out of the grass area. You can also try using a rake to pull the mix back into the infield area.

Edge Maintenance can be done using a leaf rake, stiff broom, or water hose. Often infield mix will build up around the infield edge and cause “lips” or “barriers.” “Lips” can be a major hazard and prevent standing water from draining properly. Addressing the edges weekly (or as often as post game) can help reduce the build up in certain traffic areas and prevent the erosion of edges. A regular rake used along the edge can prevent infield mix from migrating to the grass. When raking, position yourself on the infield facing the grass edge. Try raking the edge in a pulling motion from the grass toward the infield mix.

E: Base, Home Plate, and Pitcher's Mound

The following suggestions are for skinned areas of the infield:

- ◆ Rake the excess material from underneath the bases to level the area.
- ◆ Remove debris, rocks, weeds, etc.
- ◆ Pull infield mix from high spots to fill & level low spots. If mix is very dry and water is available, use a watering can to wet the areas to improve consistency.
- ◆ Tamp areas that need fill and leveling whenever possible.
- ◆ Prior to dragging, hand rake around edges, paths, mounds and home plate leaving 6 inches or greater for the drag to pass freely.



Base Paths: To avoid raking into the grass, do not rake side to side. Rake up and down the base path. If some spots require raking toward the edges, lift rake blades as you approach the edge to avoid the build up of material when you stop your stroke. If lime builds up to the point of forming a cake-like material, it can be difficult to scarify the base path.

A flat-blade shovel is a good tool to remove the caked on lime prior to raking base paths.

Pitcher's Mound: Dimensions will vary for 90' and 60' mounds. The area should be free of debris and hand raked to fill low spots caused by pitchers pivoting, digging in, and landing after the follow through. The "table" areas surrounding the rubber should be scarified and tamped when needed. Infield mix can be iron raked or if compacted and high spots develop, use a shovel to loosen areas



Home Plate: Home plate areas should be hand raked as should base paths, coaches boxes, and pitching mounds. Low spots should be filled and leveled. Where the clay is dry, a watering can may help with improving the binding and consistency of the mix. Tampering spots at home plate can help level. More infield mix may be required as well. This mix should be requested through parks and recreation and a work order will be scheduled for the maintenance.

F: Suggested Post Game Maintenance

Coaches & Volunteers: Preventative maintenance can greatly improved the life of a field. Take 15-20 minutes after each game to repair the field of play, Here are a few steps to follow:

- Rake infield mix away from grass edges to prevent lips.
- Fill all holes and low spots for safety around bases, pitcher's plate, and various high traffic areas within the infield.
- Rake base paths and home plate to scarify, fill and level areas.
- Legacy: hand drag infield



Rakes:

Board or Smoothing Rake:

For smoothing and leveling infield mix.

Garden Iron Rake:

For deeper scarifying and turning over mix to help level, dry, and mix materials.

Leave Rake:

To rake infield mix from grass edge. Popular rake for this is the plastic fan style leaf rake.



G. Using Mat Drags:

Never drag over the bases. You can damage the base.

The drag and grass edge should never overlap. This can create lips/barriers.

Always lift the drag when you are finished. Do not drag it over the grass.

Perform your edge maintenance and raking first before you drag infield.

Alternate the direction you drag the field.

Skinned Field: Make two perimeter passes. Then, go to the center and work your way out. Overlap each pass until complete.

Avoid exiting the field in the same place each time so a build up is prevented.

H. Tips for Inspecting Bases:

The Soft Touch Bases are designed to flex and absorb energy as a player slides into the base. Enough force to the base will disengage it from the ground receptacle, to be replaced easily after disengagement. The yellow plug is to be used inside each ground receptacle (mount) during play.

Inspecting: Remove bases and inspect mount inserts for clay build up, cracks, and lifts. When identifying cracks, rips, exposed mounts and anchors or any excessive wear-n-tear of bases, home plate, and pitcher's plate, report conditions to the Parks & Recreation Department immediately. **Note:** The ground receptacle should not be less than one inch below the playing surface to ensure player will not make contact with it.



Step One: Remove clay from receptacle (mount) and inspect equipment. Rake infield mix around base to level the low spots and playing surface.

Step Two: Yellow Tapered Plug is inserted into mount and lays flush with the base of the ground receptacle (mount).



Step Three: Place the Soft Touch Base inside the receptacle (mount) with the yellow tapered plug inside.

Step Four: For maximum stability, make sure the underside of the base is making full contact with the ground at all time with no voids or hollows.

PLAY BALL!



I. Concluding Remarks



Yorktown Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining a number of public athletic fields within the community. One of the most important aspects of athletic fields is its ability to maximize drainage to remove excess water from the playing surface. To help improve the recovery time for drying and pro-long the life of fields, Parks personnel provide maintenance on a daily basis. However, with the amount of use on these fields the Town is dependent on our coaches and volunteers to assist in this routine preparation and post game maintenance.

The creation of these guidelines is to provide insight and tips for volunteers maintaining and protecting the playing surfaces of our softball and baseball fields. The information will be useful in educating coaches and volunteers on the tools, proper techniques, and overall procedures involved in maintaining proper playing conditions. Understanding and implementing these guidelines will be essential in protecting players and preventing field damage when determining if a field is playable or worth the cost of making it playable.

Thank you to all our coaches, coordinators, and club volunteers for dedicating themselves to providing safe, sustainable playing surfaces for our community.

**PREPARING TODAY TO LAST FOR
TOMORROW**

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