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## /// "SCIENTIFIC STUDIES" AND ARTIFICIAL TURF-B.S AT IT'S FINEST

27 AUG / 2015



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\*The views of this article are of Sports Turf Northwest's only. Sports Turf Northwest is not against synthetic turf but against the denial of health related issues with synthetic turf. Why not be proactive for the safety of athletes instead of using "scientific studies" to hide behind? Synthetic turf is a growing industry and will continue to grow. Until there is regulatory oversight in place profits will override safety. Remember when cigarettes posed no health concerns?

Got your attention? It's time to look at the term "scientific studies" and why the artificial turf industry blankets any health related issues with "scientific studies". For three years I have been writing about Staph and MRSA infections and how these infections relate to artificial turf. These health concerns are what I know best and yes I sell equipment to destroy Staph and MRSA on artificial turf but the point of this piece is the handling of all health related issues and how they are treated by the artificial turf industry. Bad publicity on synthetic turf will get a "scientific study" to counterbalance the negativity. Why do we need "scientific studies" when common sense gives us the real answer, perhaps it's the almighty green dollar?

Richard Smith, former editor of the [British Medical Journal](#), puts it:

***MOST SCIENTIFIC STUDIES ARE WRONG, AND THEY ARE WRONG BECAUSE SCIENTISTS ARE INTERESTED IN FUNDING AND CAREERS RATHER THAN TRUTH.***

From the [Synthetic Turf Council's website](#).

***SCIENCE IS AN IMPORTANT FOCUS FOR THE STC. THAT'S WHY WE ACTIVELY COLLECT INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND STUDIES FROM THIRD-PARTY ORGANIZATIONS ABOUT SYNTHETIC TURF AND ITS SYSTEM COMPONENTS UNDER THE FOLLOWING TOPICS: PLAYER PERFORMANCE & RISK OF INJURY; ENVIRONMENTAL & HEALTH RISK OF SYNTHETIC TURF WITH CRUMB RUBBER INFILL; HEAT; STAPH & MRSA***

According to the Synthetic Turf Council, synthetic turf has no health related issues at all. Concerns about crumb rubber toxicity, injury, heat stress, Staph and MRSA are all just a bunch of hot air topics and can be discredited by "scientific studies" which have so conveniently been provided by independent research and studies from third-party organizations. If a parent or news organization made a statement of how the infill material ends up in the washing machine (the black infill material goes everywhere your kid or clothes does) you can bet some "scientific study" would show up discrediting the statement and the STC would amend the above statement with a comma behind MRSA and add , Washing Machine Danger.

We all know how organizations like the Synthetic Turf Council work, start an organization and then get companies and people who have a vested interest in the industry to pay a membership fee. It's like lobbying without going to Washington. The self appointed voice of the industry who provides a depository of cutting edge "scientific studies" so everyone can feel good about the industry. The manufacturer of equipment I sell is a member of the STC because not to be a member means lack of exposure. The UVC turf equipment I promote that kills Staph and MRSA has been laughed at by the STC as pointless, turf manufacturers have tried to say the warranty of the turf will be voided if the equipment is used.

There are lots of "scientific studies" available to refute negativity about artificial turf but I will focus on only one as an example of information being twisted, interpreted wrong and supplied by a so called third-party organization. I know this study very well as it is used over and over and over again to counter the argument that Staph and MRSA pose a danger to athletes. I have written about the study before and have had a editorial disagreement with FieldTurf about it, [Artificial Turf Manufacturers are Acting Like Big Tobacco, Profits Over the Safety of Athletes](#). FieldTurf is a very large corporation that has sold over 4,500 artificial turf projects. The voice of FieldTurf is Darren Gill, VP Global Marketing and I disagree on how FieldTurf and Darren Gill use a certain "scientific study" to avoid the real issue concerning Staph and MRSA. Common sense will always trump "scientific studies" so I will let you decide the argument below.

Background, whenever the topic of artificial turf and infections of Staph and MRSA are brought up the first "scientific study" that is referenced is research done by Andrew S. McNitt, Ph.D. of the SCIENCE, Penn State University. Dr. McNitt could be classified as the foremost expert in the field and has provided tremendous research. I have no issue with Dr. McNitt or his research but my issue is how his research is being used to discredit health concerns by turf manufacturers and the Synthetic Turf Council. It's all about interpretation.

The Synthetic Turf Council is proud to reference "independent third-party organizations" as the means where information is gathered. FieldTurf in 2009 joined forces with Penn State to create the

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The world's largest artificial turf manufacturer, FieldTurf, is a funding partner for research at Penn State. The Synthetic Turf Council along with turf manufacturers use "scientific studies" from Penn State to calm fears about Staph and MRSA. Do you see the connection of "independent third-party organizations"? The research paper, [A Survey of Microbial Populations in Infilled Synthetic Turf Fields](#) Dr. Andrew McNitt, is a good research paper. The findings of the study are that artificial turf does not harbor or grow harmful bacteria, such as Staph and MRSA. I completely agree that artificial turf is not acting like a giant growing coral reef and that below the surface Staph and MRSA is not breeding and spreading. But if I use common sense, bodily fluids+cut or abrasion of the skin=a dangerous health situation. Who is monitoring the playing surface and what policies and procedures are in place to deal with bodily fluids? All sports being played on artificial turf are all contact sports that have a higher degree of bodily fluids contaminating the artificial turf. To make the common sense argument very black and white, a recreational league player might have a nasty blood infection who cuts him or herself and bleeds on the turf. Your child's team is next to play on the turf and is next up for some contact with nasty infected blood, do you see the problem? The health issue of Staph and MRSA is a result of not sterilizing the surface. Here is how I see the problem [Trust the Center For Disease Control When It Comes to Facts About MRSA and Staph](#)

Instead of addressing the health related issues about bodily fluids, the synthetic turf industry would rather use a "scientific study" to say there are no health related issues at hand. The research studies are true but the results are being used for the wrong discussion and argument. Bad publicity for artificial turf might mean that, hold your breath, natural turf might be a better option and a lost sale might occur. There is no stopping the artificial turf machine and installation of artificial turf will continue to grow. School boards hold hearings about the safety and costs, parents get to speak their mind but in the end the artificial turf is getting installed. The whole process is a giant charade so everyone can say they really looked at all the issues.

There are two groups that will ultimately create change and put safety ahead of "scientific studies". Right now the voices of parents are not organized as one but are fractured across the country so any concerns related to health are easily stopped cold and the discussion ends quickly. I get the phone calls from concerned mothers all the time so I can say there is a great concern brewing. In time organization of the voices will take place and when that happens the industry will be forced to act. Kids for decades have had their brains bouncing around in helmets and suffering concussions. Finally the voices for concern grew too loud, the football industry blinked and now concussions are treated as a serious issue.

The group I would be most afraid of are the lawyers.

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