



Wet Weather Ground Inspection Guidance

The following measures are to be used as a guide to assist clubs in making a decision about ground closures.

Surface Water

Competition and training must be cancelled if there is any surface water visible on the field. The only exception to this would be if the area affected was small (less than 2m²), in a low usage/wear area and the rest of the ground is firm, and no other issues such as ground softness and poor grass cover are evident. Surface water means that the ground has reached saturation point and will be damaged very quickly if played on.

Ground Softness

Competition and training must be cancelled if there is any sinking into the field when walking on it and this does not bounce back or if when standing still/walking water rises up to the surface. The only exception to this would be if the only area affected was small (less than 2m²), in a low usage/wear area and the rest of the field was firm and poor grass cover is not an additional issue. Water rising to the surface when walking on it means that the ground has reached saturation point and will be damaged very quickly if played on.

Amount of Rainfall

Rainfall leading into competition and training should be used to guide decisions. If it has rained heavily or consistently leading up to training and/or competition then this should aid the decision to be made. Some grounds will take rain all week and be fine on the weekend for competition; other grounds will have no rain all week and rain the night before an event and will need to be cancelled. Clubs should take into consideration the rainfall during the week, the night before and the forecast for the day of training/competition when making decisions.

Soil profile and Drainage

Some fields naturally drain better than others; this has to do with the soil profile below the surface. Sand based fields (usually near the coast - sandy profile) drain quicker and more effectively than those on natural ground (away from the coast - heavier profile) or former tip sites (heaviest profile). Clubs should have a good idea of the drainage and amount of rainfall their ground can take, and this should be considered when making decisions.

Grass cover

During the winter season grass cover can often get below 60% or 70% and be fine for play during dry weather. However, during wet weather if overall grass cover is below 70% then this ground is likely to wear more substantially under wet weather training and competition than grounds with more grass cover. If a decision is made to play or train on wet ground with low grass cover, then this may cause irreparable damage to your field.

Amount and type of activity

If your club is about to have a full days competition, with 20 or more teams due to play, then this is going to have a considerable effect on the ground during wet weather. Grounds can be damaged very quickly over 1 or 2 weekends with heavy use and wet weather. Also, juniors and seniors impact the ground differently and clubs need to understand the impact that different groups have on the grounds.

Junior games should be given priority over senior games for the long term benefit of the sport when it comes to making decisions about cancelling certain games. The dual benefit of this priority is that junior games can take place with less damage to the grounds (comparing 1 junior game to 1 senior game) and these members are the long term future of your club.

However, if the ground is just playable and there is a significant amount of games to be played which will cause the ground to deteriorate as the day goes on, then consideration should be given to cancelling some minor games (such as over age competition or lower division games) so that premier games can be played if this is the clubs priority.

Inspection of grounds

Grounds should be inspected the day before an event if there has been regular rain leading into the event. All grounds should be inspected the morning of an event and if a decision to go ahead with play has been made then the ground should be assessed again mid morning to see what effect the first few games have had on the ground. This is especially important when the decision to allow play was a difficult decision. Consistency of inspections should also be a priority for clubs - the same person should do the inspections for a competition day and the club should nominate a couple of people to undertake inspections of their grounds.

Two main issues need to be taken into account for ground closures due to wet weather:

1) Player safety - while it is often considered that hard ground is the main concern in relation to player safety, slippery and heavy turf is also the cause of player injury. If grass dislodges easily players can find it hard to maintain footing and more unusual injuries can occur due to irregular movement and responses to the conditions. Another safety issue is dirty water in puddles. Stagnant water sitting in muddy puddles can carry bacteria that can cause illness. Council, Associations and Clubs have a duty of care and OH&S obligations to their players and must ensure the safety of players as their first priority.

2) Irreparable damage to field - clubs need to ensure their grounds are not damaged for 1 day's play which could see their ground taken out of action for maintenance for a number of weeks. Clubs should try to think what affect 22-30 players running, tackling and/or scrummaging on this field will have? If you are in doubt then maybe erring on the side of caution will ensure your ground is still suitable for play in the last few weeks of the season.