

Synthetic Grass... A Grass Roots Movement

by Steve Walker Owner of a Synthetic Grass Company Since 1987

April 2002, Denver - We live in a semi-arid environment; however, in recent years it's been more like a desert! Many Denverites think this is the Midwest, planting grass like there's no tomorrow. Wake up Denver, we are in a drought! We must change our over-zealous need for sod, seed, and water.

Xeriscaping is gaining momentum as a viable alternative for grass lawns. So why is the acceptance of synthetic grass taking so long? The new synthetic grass is nothing like the old indoor/outdoor artificial turf. Kneel down close enough to inspect it and you can tell it's not real. But like one of those really good artificial Christmas trees, from a few feet away, it looks real. You have to touch it to be sure. It's so lifelike it fools people and pets too!

Some Denver-Metro cities are paranoid of synthetic grass, and have even gone as far as banning it. In a recent town meeting the city of Thornton banned synthetic grass, and mandated the removal of residential synthetic lawns. It's ironic that the city of Thornton uses the same synthetic grass at their very own Five-Star Stadium. On the other hand, cities have liability burdens, and must take precautions. Cities say synthetic turf is too new and unproven.

From my perspective, it's not new. My company ProGreen International, Inc. has been installing synthetic grass since 1987. We have installed hundreds of thousands of square feet of synthetic grass for playgrounds, dog runs, athletic fields, putting greens and landscape grass. To date, we have not experienced any problems with run-off, fading or deterioration. So again, from our experience, a properly manufactured and installed synthetic grass system is a proven product.

The city of Aurora has authorized a single homeowner to be the official test site for synthetic grass. Does this mean the fate of synthetic grass, in Aurora, is in the hands of one homeowner? Even though we have properly manufactured and installed synthetic turf systems that have already been installed, tested, and proven, we support more testing and anticipate positive results from Aurora's test site. We applaud Aurora for putting out the effort to get synthetic turf approved and on its way into drought stricken residential yards.

Opponents of synthetic grass are primarily concerned about property values, drainage, flammability, utility access, fading, and mold. Each of these issues are addressed below.

- **Will Property values decrease?** If anything, we believe property values would increase due to lower water costs and the lack of sprinkler system maintenance. The only negative impact we have encountered is that synthetic grass remains green, even in the dead of winter (is that really bad?). However, a creative combination of xeriscaping and synthetic grass provides a more natural appearance.
- **Drainage Problems?** A common misconception is that the new synthetic grass is similar to household carpet. In fact this intricate system involves properly constructing a sub-base, and utilizing turf with holes in the backing that is filled with sand and rubber granules. This system diverts the majority of water vertically, just like natural grass. The sand/rubber granules, which we call "infill," absorb and hold the water, which eventually drains through the holes and sub-base material. Some water will run off the top under heavy rains, just as natural grass or dirt would. Since water drains vertically, soil heating or organic loss is not an issue. Synthetic turf has a vertical drainage advantage over rock because the infill material (sand and rubber) absorbs and holds water, which allows for increased vertical drainage and evaporation.
- **Flammability?** As long as the grass is properly filled, the infill material (sand and rubber) will prevent a fire from spreading, and actually extinguish a fire. We've had our product tested for flammability and it passed with flying colors. Our products are designed to meet the most stringent requirements of fire tests. We believe a synthetic turf system is less susceptible to flammability than a dead natural grass lawn.

- **Utility Access?** Some city officials are worried about the difficulty in gaining access for utility repair. It is not difficult to cut the material and roll the turf (with the infill) back, away from the utility repair area. When the utility repair has been made and the dirt is replaced and re-graded, the turf is simply rolled back and seamed. The seam is virtually invisible. If this repair were done on natural grass, sod would have to be replaced. And who knows, with all the water restrictions, the sod may never grow back!
- **Fading?** We have been installing synthetic turf products in Denver since 1987 and have experienced very minimal fading. We estimate the yarn will fade two *Pantone™* shades every 10 years. This is hardly discernable by the naked eye.
- **Mold?** Present day synthetic turf systems have been designed to eliminate mold as a problem. In fact, a natural grass system will support the growth of mold to a much greater degree.
- **Pets?** The same landscape grass we install in yards is the same as we sell for dog runs. Pet feces can be removed with a shovel, and urine washes through the system. It's really no different than natural grass.

Once educated with synthetic turf installation processes, doubts regarding synthetic grass should be alleviated.

Recently, Thornton residents, Bruce and Marge Spainhower, were told to remove their synthetic lawn. Marge Spainhower, in her statement to the city, said,

"I would like to invite you to come and inspect our lawn and see how the lawn looks and how the process works. We had over 30 inches of snow on our synthetic lawn from the big snowstorm and we had no drainage problems when it melted. You can put a lighted match or burning cigarette on top of it and it does not burn, it's immediately extinguished by the sand mixture that covers it. A dry lawn is a bigger fire hazard than this turf. As far as pets are concerned, we have a dog and she wets on it and it evaporates just like a real grass, and you don't have to worry about yellow spots all over as it does not stain and gets washed through the system when it rains."

I think the benefits far outweigh the negatives. Water shortages are becoming an epidemic in Colorado. According to the Denver Water Board, over 50% of our water usage goes to maintaining landscapes. Imagine the water that could be saved if only 10% of Colorado homeowners didn't have to water their lawns.

What surprises me most, are the people that are against artificial grass, are also against environmentally harmful pesticides and fertilizers. Our product negates the necessity for additional fertilizers and pesticides in our environment. The use of our turf products provides another use for tires that would have ended up in our landfills. We have customers that desperately want our product, only to be told "no" by their homeowner's association board or municipality. The opponents have not been educated with current turf technology. Their anxiety and fears will disappear once they understand that this is a PROVEN PRODUCT.

Lighten up Colorado! Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico have been installing synthetic grass by the truckloads. Instead of banning synthetic grass, we should be embracing it! How about giving tax credits or rebates to people who install water saving surfaces?

Let's conserve our most precious natural resource; water, and beautify our homes with a no maintenance, great looking, safe, synthetic grass system.

Steve Walker, President
 ProGreen International, Inc.
 Denver, CO
www.progreen.com 303-464-7888