

Water: A Softball Field's Best Friend and Its Worst Enemy; and, other Valuable Tips in Caring and Preparing a Field for Practice or Play

Many of you have dragged many infields, chalked miles of foul lines, repaired pitchers mounds, pulled weeds, and spread countless yards of infield mix and soil drying agents. Much of this work can be avoided if everyone using the fields understand the importance of "water"; when to use it and when to avoid it! Below are tips on how to properly use water on a softball field and also, other information in preparing and maintaining a ball field for play!

- Never drag or rake a dirt infield that is dry, for several reasons: first, all that expensive infield mix becomes dust and floats away in the breeze; and, secondly, it is a violation of city ordinance to create a dust cloud. Using the infield water system, or with a hose, or both, wet the infield dirt, including the foul territory and infield thoroughly before raking or mechanically dragging (3-wheeler or similar) the field. "Thoroughly" means that dust does not fly when a rake or mechanical drag is used. Be careful not to get it too wet!
- Don't drive a mechanical drag the 2-3 feet right next to the outfield or infield grass. All you achieve is creating the "lip" at the point where the dirt and grass meet. This lip becomes an ongoing maintenance issue! Use an infield rake in these areas, raking parallel to the grass/dirt line. Coaches, have the players use whisk-brooms to sweep dirt along the edge back into the infield.
- Drag the field in different patterns. Always dragging in a circular pattern will create ruts in the field. Never use a private vehicle (car or truck) to pull a drag. They are simply too heavy and will cause more damage than good (break irrigation lines, etc).
- In-between games or practices, if you do not intend to fully water and drag the infield, spot water the holes, fill them in with moist dirt, and stamp down to firm up the dirt.
- After the last game or practice is over, water the dirt infield thoroughly first, then fill in and stamp down the holes/depressions at the mound, bases, and batters/catchers boxes. After the depressions have been filled and the dirt infield is thoroughly watered, give it a final drag for the night. Please do not water any turf area. The fields are all watered by an electronically managed watering system. If you do notice a watering problem (areas to dry or wet), please advise the Field Coordinator or your Division Rep who will contact the City's Parks Division.
- Soft-toss: Playing soft-toss against a backstop or fence using hardballs, softballs, cush-balls, whiffle-balls, or other forms of practice/plays balls is never acceptable.
- Finally, teach your players, the kids, how to care for the fields. This teaches values, leadership, responsibility, volunteerism, and respect. Two coaches can expend more than an hour both before and after a game preparing the field. If the players help, the work can be done in about 15 minutes!

Remember, our softball fields are played on by hundreds of youth softball players annually. The tips provided above will help keep these fields in good condition. Thanks for taking the time to read this and have a great time at the ball park! Play ball!