



# Club and School Guidance - Dry weather and hard pitch conditions

## Practical guidance for clubs and schools planning training and fixtures

Scottish Rugby guidance is to help clubs and schools prepare for the potential and on-going impact of long term dry weather on natural turf pitches and associated player welfare.

It provides a consistent framework for assessing conditions and considering appropriate adjustments to training and fixtures. Conditions will vary locally, so each club remains responsible for inspecting its own pitches and deciding whether activity can proceed safely.

### Key message

Player and participant welfare is paramount. Each club and school is responsible for assessing its own pitches and local conditions and deciding whether activity can proceed safely. Scottish Rugby cannot determine whether an individual pitch is safe to use.

## Why this guidance has been issued

Prolonged dry and hot weather can leave natural turf pitches unusually hard, uneven or cracked. This may increase the risk associated with running, falling, tackling and other contact activity. Conditions can vary significantly between venues, or even between different areas of the same pitch, so decisions must be based on a current local assessment.

## Club / School responsibility

Clubs, schools and venue operators should use their knowledge of the site, current conditions and the planned activity to make a reasonable and documented decision (as part of a regular risk assessment process). This guidance supports that judgement; it does not replace it or remove any responsibility owned by a club, coach, organiser, venue operator or match official.

- Nominate a responsible person to inspect the pitch before every training session and fixture.
- Record the inspection, decision and any controls introduced.
- Repeat the assessment if weather, pitch conditions or the planned activity changes.
- If the club is not satisfied that risks can be managed appropriately, do not proceed on that pitch.

## Before every session or fixture

Walk the whole playing and run-off area, paying particular attention to high-use and high-impact locations. Consider:

- Surface hardness and whether there is sufficient give underfoot;
- Cracks, holes, exposed stones, bare areas, ruts or other trip hazards;
- Whether the surface is stable and footwear can gain suitable purchase;
- The age, experience and needs of the participants;
- The type, intensity and duration of the planned activity, particularly contact and repeated ground impacts;



- Whether conditions are expected to improve or deteriorate during the activity.

## Decide and act

Following the assessment, the club / school should choose the safest reasonable option:

| Decision           | Examples                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Proceed            | Conditions are suitable for the planned activity, with normal controls in place.                                                    |
| Modify             | Reduce or remove contact and ground-impact work; shorten the session; increase recovery, use a safer part of the pitch or facility. |
| Relocate           | Move to another suitable natural or artificial surface, subject to availability and the normal checks.                              |
| Postpone or cancel | Use this option where the risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level.                                                           |

## Training on hard ground

Where a pitch remains usable but ground impact is a concern, coaches should adapt the session rather than defaulting to the original plan. Options may include:

- Non-contact or reduced-contact practice;
- Technical work at controlled speed and intensity;
- Decision-making, handling, kicking and conditioned games that minimise players going to ground;
- Using tackle bags, tackle mats or suitable alternative equipment where this reduces ground impact (reminder that adults should not hold tackle bags for children); and
- Moving conditioning away from the pitch to a safer surface.

Any adaptation should remain appropriate to the players' age, experience and stage of preparation. Coaches should continue to monitor the surface and participants throughout the session and stop or change activity if concerns arise.

## Pitch care during prolonged dry weather

Ground teams should work within local water restrictions (if applicable) and seek specialist advice where needed. Practical measures may include:

- Raising the mowing height and reducing mowing frequency when growth slows;
- Avoiding unnecessary maintenance that adds stress to dormant or drought-affected turf;
- Targeting any permitted irrigation at priority areas, during cooler periods, and avoiding surface run-off
- Make the most of any rainfall that does occur. Try to encourage as much of this rain to infiltrate as naturally as possible.
- When reacting to rainfall, water will take a while to infiltrate the soil. Avoid rolling the pitch if you can, as that will elongate the impact. Instead, allow the water to irrigate naturally.
- If rainfall falls on seeded areas – help germination with germination sheets.



- Closing or clearly marking isolated unsafe areas where this can be done without creating another hazard.

### **Communication and fixture decisions**

Where a fixture may be affected due to pitch conditions, the same process applies to a frozen or water-logged pitch. Clubs / schools should communicate early with the opposition, appointed match officials and your Scottish Rugby Competition coordinator. The club's pre-activity assessment remains essential;

The match referee has the authority and is empowered to postpone or not start a match if they deem the pitch to be dangerous or unsafe (including hard, frozen, or rock-hard ground).

If both teams (e.g. captains or coaches) are willing to play, the referee retains the ultimate discretion to decline to officiate on safety grounds, which prevents the match from proceeding.

If a club/school decides not to use a pitch, it should keep a short record of the reasons and the alternatives considered. Safety decisions made reasonably and in good faith should be communicated clearly and supported.

We strongly encourage early, practical and pragmatic discussions so all parties can agree and support the final decision.

### **Simple inspection record**

A brief record can include date and time; pitch and areas checked; weather; surface condition and hazards; planned activity; decision; controls or changes; name of assessor; and time of any reassessment.

### **Further information and resources to help clubs.**

[Grounds Management Association: Managing sports pitches during drought](#)