

# ***Grass Pitch Usage During Drought***

*A guide for Clubs, Leagues and Match Officials*

**This guidance is intended to help clubs, leagues and match officials assess risks consistently and manage grass pitch use responsibly during periods of drought and exceptionally dry conditions. It does not introduce a blanket suspension of football on dry grass pitches.**

*Periods of drought and prolonged hot, dry weather can leave natural grass football pitches extremely dry and hard. Many grassroots pitches have little or no irrigation and remain dependent on meaningful rainfall for recovery. The priority is to keep football playing safely wherever possible, while managing pitch use sensibly and avoiding unnecessary damage during prolonged dry conditions.*

#### **Before training or matches:**

*Clubs and pitch operators should check their pitches and training areas regularly, and particular attention should be given to:*

- **Surface hardness** - *very dry ground can become extremely firm and potentially unsuitable for play;*
- **Cracking or uneven ground** - *including significant openings or movement in the soil;*
- **Bare or worn areas** - *that may affect the safety of the surface e.g. goal mouths, centre circles and other high-wear areas;*
- *Any other part of the surface which could present an **increased risk to players**.*

*A pitch being brown or dormant does **not automatically mean it is unsafe or unplayable**. The condition of the individual playing surface should be assessed. Where there are concerns, clubs should speak with their groundskeeper or pitch provider and consider whether use should be reduced, relocated or postponed.*



# Clubs

*During periods of drought and prolonged dry weather, clubs should focus on balancing player safety, pitch protection and continued football activity. Early communication with leagues, opponents and match officials is important to manage expectations and avoid unnecessary travel. Clubs should also take a long-term view and avoid unnecessary damage to already stressed pitches.*

## **Clubs should:**

- **Check the condition** of their pitches ahead of training and fixtures;
- **Work closely** with their **groundskeeper or pitch provider**;
- **Avoid unnecessary training or additional activity** on pitches showing significant stress;
- **Use alternative training areas or facilities** where practical;
- **Notify their league** as early as possible if there is a concern about whether a fixture can be played;
- **Avoid maintenance activity** that could further stress very dry ground and follow Football Foundation / GMA technical guidance. Where significant maintenance is planned, speak to your groundskeeper or contractor about whether it should be delayed.

*Clubs hiring pitches from local authorities, schools, parish councils or other providers should contact the pitch operator where there are concerns rather than attempting any maintenance themselves.*



# Leagues

During periods of drought, leagues should be prepared for increased pitch related issues. During such times, please note there is no blanket suspension of football on dry grass pitches.

## Leagues should:

- Ask clubs to **check pitches early** in the week where conditions are causing concern;
- Encourage **early communication** between clubs, pitch providers and match officials to help avoid unnecessary travel;
- **Support sensible use of alternative pitches** or fixture rearrangements where available;
- **Avoid unnecessary pressure** on clubs to play where there is a genuine concern over surface safety. Where appropriate, consider switching a fixture to the opponent's ground if that pitch remains safe and competition rules allow;
- **Ensure clubs understand the relevant competition procedures** where a pitch may not be suitable for play;
- Leagues should also remember that, under SCOR/Y, an entire programme of matches should not be cancelled or postponed without prior approval from the Sanctioning Authority: "The Competition shall not cancel, postpone, or withdraw an entire programme of Competition Matches (e.g. all Competition Matches, or all Competition Matches within a single age group or division, taking place over a single day/week) without prior written approval from the Sanctioning Authority,..."
- **Share the Football Foundation / GMA drought guidance with member clubs**, which can be found by clicking [here](#).



# Match Officials

*During periods of drought and exceptionally dry weather, many natural grass pitches may become significantly harder than normal. Match officials should be alert to this when carrying out their normal pre-match inspection of the field of play.*

## Match officials should:

*A dry or brown playing surface is **not automatically unsafe or unsuitable for play**. The condition of each pitch should be considered individually, including whether:*

- The surface is excessively hard;*
- There are significant cracks, holes or uneven areas;*
- Goal mouths or other high-wear areas present a particular concern, and any part of the playing surface presents a danger to players.*

*Where there are known concerns, referees should contact the home club in advance and arrive early enough to carry out a thorough inspection.*

## Decision to play

*The referee retains responsibility for deciding whether the field of play is suitable for the match. The decision should be based on the actual condition of the playing surface and player safety, rather than its appearance alone. If conditions change or deteriorate during a match, the referee should continue to consider whether the field remains suitable for play in accordance with the Laws of the Game.*



# Grounds Maintenance

*Where grass is dormant or severely stressed, groundskeepers should avoid maintenance activity which places additional stress on the plant or attempts to force recovery before adequate moisture is available. For detailed technical advice on managing natural grass pitches during periods of drought and prolonged dry weather, groundskeepers should follow the latest Football Foundation / GMA guidance.*

## Deciding whether a match can be played

*There is no blanket suspension of football on dry grass pitches.*

*Conditions vary considerably between individual sites. A dry or brown pitch may remain perfectly suitable for football, while another pitch may have become excessively hard, cracked or otherwise unsuitable.*

*Where a referee is appointed, the referee will make the final decision on whether the field of play is suitable for the match in accordance with the Laws of the Game and relevant competition procedures. Clubs and leagues should therefore identify potential problems early and communicate before teams and officials travel wherever possible.*

## Further support

*Groundskeepers and clubs should refer to the latest Football Foundation / GMA guidance for technical advice on managing natural grass pitches during drought conditions, which can be found by clicking [here](#).*

