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Major new fears emerge over absence of recycling plan for 3G pitches

By Sam Wallace, CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER

12 September 2018 • 8:31pm



Major new fears have emerged about the environmental toll of 3G pitches on generations to come, with a television documentary having revealed that there is no viable plan to recycle the huge numbers of surfaces the English Football

There is only one recycling plant in Europe that can break down and purify the different elements of 3G pitches, located in Herning in Denmark. The operator, Re-Match, had hoped to build another plant in the UK but is yet to reach an agreement that would guarantee it the necessary supply of obsolete pitches to make the investment.

In a statement, the FA said: “The FA, as a partner with other sporting governing bodies, has a contract in place with chosen providers and contractors to ensure that it is a legal requirement for all 3G pitches to be disposed of responsibly. We also request written statements and details from them about how this is done.”

Youngsters train on a 3G pitch two years ago | CREDIT: Getty Images

The FA is weighing up a £1 billion deal with Fulham owner Shahid Khan to sell Wembley Stadium, with the profits to be spent on grass-roots football, including the building of more 3G pitches.

As well as [unproven alleged links between rubber crumb and cancer](#), the Zembla investigation has discovered a disturbing environmental impact of 3G pitches beyond their useful life as surfaces on which to play sport. The average lifespan is around 10 years.

The Zembla investigation “The Turf Mountain” centred upon two Dutch companies, TUF and Vink, who removed 3G pitches which were found to have no long-term recycling plan and were stockpiling pitches in conditions dangerous to workers and the environment. Local authorities conceded they were fearful of shutting down the companies in question in case the cost of disposing safely of the stockpiles of obsolete pitches fell to them.

The Telegraph spoke to one company in southern England which specialises in removing pitches and claims that it recycles all of the material it brings in. The old artificial turf is used in the manufacture of hanging baskets or is sold to golf clubs, farms and horse-riding centres for use as durable flooring.

Even this re-use is a controversial subject with some arguing that under European Union law, the turf cannot be resold in its original form. The industry body, the European Synthetic Turf Organisation stipulating that when an artificial pitch “reaches the end of its service life it must be classified as a waste and any materials separated from the surface are also classified as waste until they have been fully recovered”.

One individual who asked not to be named working in the recycling of 3G pitches in the UK described it as a “massive issue” and said that in the next two decades the problem “will escalate beyond belief”. “Most surfaces will have to be relaid in the next 10 to 15 years and there will have to be a home for them. You cannot begin to imagine how much. You will be able to fill Wembley Stadium [with artificial turf].”

A Fifa report last year found that since 2006, 3.437 pitches had been certified with the world governing body in 149 countries. The UK and Holland were identified by Fifa among the most prolific installers of 3G pitches.

Each 3G pitch weighs an average of around 220 tonnes and The Telegraph has learned of another site in southern England, which it has chosen not to identify, where around 25,000-30,000 tonnes of old artificial turf are being stored. Much of the artificial turf is in such a poor state that it cannot be reused in any form and that

is thought to represent just a small part of the problem that the industry faces in the next few decades.

Currently, it costs between £15,000 and £20,000 to roll up and remove a 3G pitch, including the cost of transporting it, with some recycling companies then selling it on at between £1-£2 per square metre if they can find a market.

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