

Carpet the outside of the world

by Norris Legue

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Norris Legue is president of Synthetic Surfaces, Inc., a company specializing in recreational surfaces. He is recognized as an industry expert on the installation of grass carpeting, and has lectured extensively on artificial turf installation techniques, most recently before attendees at the 1974 National Association of Floor Covering Installers convention.

□ "Carpet the Outside of the World"—with a potential like that we thought it would be appropriate to: (a) review the past to avoid repeating mistakes; (b) discuss the present to see where we are now; (c) give some thoughts on what's necessary to fully develop the great potential of synthetic turf.

The early problems with indoor-outdoor or utility carpet are well-known. Some seemingly good products deteriorated after being exposed to the sun, wind, rain, snow dampness, thermocycling and other weather conditions. Perhaps a slow ride in an automobile to observe peeling house paint, spalled concrete sidewalks, road potholes, rotted and weathered buildings would have brought home the fact that outdoor carpeting was a new technology that required special test work.

Some problems still persist, but most are things of the past. Fiber manufacturers now give five-year guarantees on some green turfs. Apparently, extensive tests are being conducted on the newer multi-colored fibers for tweeds and stripes. With tufted turf, most mills have had good success using a woven polypropylene primary backing. There have been a few problems with some secondary backings, but for the most part, performance is satisfactory. Of course, backing is not a factor with knitted turf.

Conventional carpet adhesives, tapes and other accessory products could not be used. Although they gave good performance for indoor carpet, they were unsatisfactory for exterior applications. However, several accessory products designed for the outdoors are now commercially available.

The biggest remaining problem is failure resulting from improper outdoor installation. Failures occur when indoor installation methods and materials are used instead of the new techniques necessary for good outdoor work. Unfortunately, in the public's eye the failure is viewed as bad turf.

This brings us to the present with basically good turf, satisfactory accessory products, improved installation techniques, but with installation failures still persisting. A more positive attitude on solving the installation problem has recently developed. Some progressive carpet mills have now taken the position that it is no longer enough to just sell a roll of turf and forget about it. Failures cost them in claims, lost customers and bad will. When possible, these mills give technical assistance and a few are even sponsoring seminars for their distributors and installers. This service will surely be remembered. Claims are reduced and some distributors have even switched suppliers because a given mill provides more assistance. One additional benefit is that the public believes a good installation is due to the turf—thus selling more jobs using the same turf.

The National Association of Floor Covering Installers tackled the installa-

tion problem at its recent national convention by devoting 50 percent of the technical seminar time to the outdoors. Carpet workrooms are also showing increased interest in learning the techniques of quality outdoor installation.

What about "the name of the game", which, freely translated, means sales and profit? The consensus is that 1974 will be a banner year for turf, as it has both aesthetic appeal and economic value. Hotels find that they can sell more rooms without added maintenance cost by installing synthetic turf putting greens, play areas and bowling greens. There are numerous places where natural grass just won't grow, such as on concrete, asphalt, sun decks, high traffic areas, boat docks, roofs and my yard. Synthetic turf is the answer.

Salesmen can take advantage of numerous opportunities to sell turf during a call to discuss conventional carpet. If he notices a patio, terrace, swimming pool, golf bag or sick lawn there's an opportunity to make an additional sale.

No one is more optimistic about the future of artificial turf than this author. I staked my career on it. However, I believe my future, as well as others, is partly dependent on installers. Good installations sell more turf and bad ones have the opposite affect. Synthetic turf covered sun decks, putting greens, swimming pools and landscaped areas, whether they be residential or commercial, draw public attention because they are on display. A roof that looks good after conversion to a lounging area or playground will certainly encourage more apartment, school and office building officials to do the same.

The market is there! Manufacturers, distributors, dealers, installers and hopefully marketing and consulting firms like mine can profit, if:

(a) New products, whether they be fiber, carpet, adhesive or tapes, are thoroughly tested outdoors in several different climates before putting them on the market.

(b) Installers learn the new techniques of outdoor installations and receive adequate compensations for these special skills.

(c) Retailers sell turf plus installation and see to it that it is done by qualified installers.

(d) All of us become "turf conscious." Both the seller and customer will find all sorts of new applications if they "think turf." Also, the thinking shouldn't be limited to green, as the new multi-colored tweeds and stripes have a great deal of appeal.

In summary, with quality materials a little thinking, a lot of imagination and good installations, the potential is unlimited. □