Athletic Field Closure and Restoration Protocol

February 2023 - Updated October 2026

Orange County's extensive rains have affected all of us in one way or another through the delay or rescheduling of outdoor activities such as picnics, gardening, or sports games. When faced with inclement weather such as rain, SAMLARC's priority focuses on player safety and preservation of fields.

Field closures are unavoidable if persistent rain inhibits field restoration work. Closures are determined by: the natural drying of the fields from wind and sun; the expectations outlined in the Sports Field Use Policy; and recommendations from SAMLARC's professional field service providers. SAMLARC is in constant communication with sports league leaders in order to facilitate safe and enjoyable playing experiences for athletes.

The extensive field restoration work required to prepare a field for play in the days following a rainstorm is designed to uphold the safety of players and preservation of athletic fields for play when the rain passes and fields are once again playable.

The first indicator of a field closure is the cumulative amount of rain received versus the amount of wind and sun exposure. When a field is exposed to these elements, the soil dries more quickly; if the field becomes sufficiently dry for safe operation of machinery, then field restoration work can begin. However, if limited sun and wind exposure could leave the fields too saturated to safely drive machinery onto the field, restoration work cannot be conducted. Once safe machine operability has been determined, a combination of infield and outfield procedures take place to offer as much playing space on the field as possible.

Infield

When conditions allow, the infield will be scarified – a process wherein spines on a machine make narrow furrows into the dirt to improve exposure to sun and wind, quickening drying time. Later that day (or the next day) the field will be combed over with a motorized drag-broom to help make the field level and smooth.

Outfield Turf

The soil beneath Rancho Santa Margarita is primarily comprised of clay, which inhibits drainage, compresses under the foot, and hinders the growth of healthy turf. SAMLARC compensates for the effects of the clay soil through winter overseeding, conducted when the Bermuda turf is dormant during the winter. The other process is "drill and fill," which occurs in spring or summer. This process involves drilling ¾" holes into the soil to a depth of 8" and filling with sand – creating better drainage and allowing the turf to strengthen its root system. Over time, the improved drainage will quicken drying time after a rain event, allowing restoration work to begin sooner. Presently, however, turf restoration can only be conducted through the drying effects of wind and sun exposure.

The Athletic Field Use and Allocation Policy establishes criteria for establishing playability, including: foot traction; depth of footprints and how quickly they fill with water; ease of dislodging turf during play; and potential suction to the ground when walking. These criteria help protect athletes' safety. Depending on playability, a combination of infields and outfields may remain open for practice or formal games.

SAMLARC communicates field closures and openings through the SAMLARC Mudline. The Mudline is available online at SAMLARC.org. and is updated at 2:00 p.m. on weekdays and 7:30 a.m. on weekends. The SAMLARC Mudline can viewed online at SAMLARC.org/mudline

Please be sure to coordinate with your team coach to learn if your games have been cancelled or rescheduled.

For questions regarding the athletic fields, please contact Ben Helm, Park and Sports Manager, at ben.helm@fsresidential.com or 949-709-4017.