Get The **Real Facts** on Synthetic Ice

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Municipal Rink Problem: How Synthetic Ice Rinks Are Part of the Solution.

It's an all too common story with municipal rinks. Aging infrastructure, millions of dollars in upgrades and repairs, escalating cost of operations and reduced budget dollars. Aging rinks all over North America face this similar situation. In Canada for example literally thousands of rinks were built in the 60's and 70's and are now facing significant operating challenges as ice plants, flooring systems, and the building envelope show their age. At the same time there is significant pressure from more and more user groups demanding more prime time ice. At a time when child obesity is raging and communities need to encourage more forms of activity sports associations that use rinks are forced to maintain or even shrink their membership to avoid reductions in available ice times.

So what is the solution?

Part of the solution is to research and investigate high quality synthetic ice companies that provide high performance and safe synthetic ice solutions. These rinks can literally save any municipality millions of capital and operating dollars by complementing, deferring or even replacing existing mechanically refrigerated artificial ice arenas.

As good as some synthetic has become, it will likely never be so good that it completely replaces real ice. However it should become part of the rink mix moving forward. Some municipalities are very progressive in their thinking and have taken steps to run pilot projects in their communities. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in Northern Alberta for example ran a series of synthetic ice pilots last fall to introduce the product to the community with great success. As a result of those pilots they have decided to tender a complete ice surface in the Archie Simpson Arena in Fort Chipewyan. This is a very unique situation in that this surface is a gravel base and they rely on mother nature to create the natural ice surface for 6 months of the year. The idea is that the synthetic panels will be placed on the gravel surface and then water will be frozen over that during the winter months. Spring and summer skating will then take place on the synthetic surface.

This will become an interesting project to follow in the coming months and could open the door for more projects of this nature. Municipalities can take comfort in knowing that their investment in these products can be warranted for up to ten years for indoor use. There are also products that are UV stable so they can be used outdoors. Life expectancy for the premium products is 20 – 25 years where everyday use is expected.

Synthetic ice is not the complete answer for solving North America's rink issues but it certainly needs to be taken seriously. ■

About the author

Tim Oldfield is owner of SmartRink. He has watched his daughter and son grow up playing hockey and develop into elite athletes who love the game. As company owner, Tim is committed to ensuring buyers and consumers of synthetic ice are educated and well informed on product choices.