

Published Article Series
Synthetic Ice Article Number 3

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Synthetic Ice: 4 Frequently Asked Questions: Helping the Consumer Make Better Choices

We get many questions from people interested in buying or just curious about synthetic ice products. Frankly there is a lot of conflicting information on the internet so we decided to help set the record straight and clear up some of the confusion out there by taking the four most popular questions and providing fact based answers. These answers will save the consumer some time and effort and help them make a more informed decision.

Q: How realistic is the synthetic ice to skate on? How does it compare to real ice?

A: The quick answer is that nothing skates like real ice. That said there are some products where the experience is excellent but most fall well short of their marketing claims unfortunately. If the user is a strong skater then they will find the better products easy to skate on. The weaker skaters will certainly notice the increased resistance. This will really be highlighted with the lower quality products. The best products skate the best and there is nothing that can't be duplicated on synthetic ice as with real ice – using a high quality panel. A very good product is one where the skater does not have to change their body mechanics to perform the same task as on real ice. They should be able to pivot, turn, skate backwards and stop just the same as real ice. Poor products force the skater to develop bad habits with posture, knee bend and stride length – all things you want to avoid.

Q: What is the price per square foot? How much should I expect to pay?

A: This is the most common question. Price is the one thing that people do understand and can compare. The problem is that unless you know the material you are comparing it is almost meaningless. We've seen price per square foot as low as \$8 and as high as \$28. We've written about understanding the importance of molecular weight in the past and how that relates to panel thickness and pricing relationships. If you want a true comparison send us a request and we'll do our best to answer your questions directly with fact based information. The best raw material costs the most money and that directly translates into a higher cost panel – plain and simple. In the case of synthetic ice – paying less money is almost never a good thing.

Q: What size are your panels? How thick are your panels?

A: Panel size can become a consideration. Some companies have 1 meter by 1 meter (3.3 feet x 3.3 feet) and some companies promote advantages of the 8 ft x 4 ft panels and there is everything in between too. Smaller panels are cheaper to ship, can sit on a standard

pallet size and easier for the average person to handle and install. Larger panels mean fewer of them to install. The companies with larger panels promote fewer joints as an advantage but in reality if the application is correct and it's a good quality panel then the skater will never feel the joint anyway so it's a moot point. As for thickness – a high quality panel with a very high molecular weight or better does not need to be thicker than 8mm or 5/16 of an inch to last 15 or more years. Often we see cheap less expensive material sold in thick panel configurations as a way to cover up that it will wear down more rapidly.

Q: How hard is synthetic ice to maintain?

A: Actually it's quite easy – but it does have to be maintained – just like any flooring product does. Typically that means vacuuming and washing the surface. Usually plain hot water and some elbow grease will work fine. Anything from a wet mop to a stiff brush will work depending on how dirty the surface it. Larger surfaces typically use a commercial floor scrubber. Also most products suggest using a glide solution to enhance the skating experience. That needs to be applied regularly. Each manufacturer will be able to provide instructions on that.