

Real Ice or Synthetic Ice?

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Imagine ice skating on July 1st in your shorts and t-shirt on an outdoor rink at a downtown festival. Pretty cool huh? Well if it's so cool, how come more of these types of rinks aren't out there?

I think there are a number of reasons why more communities are not installing synthetic ice surfaces. First of all the word just doesn't seem to be getting out there to the extent it could be. Speaking more from the Canadian experience synthetic ice can be seen as the poor cousin of real ice surfaces. The fact is that they aren't as fast and you can't glide as far - even the very best products have to admit that much - regardless of what they sometimes claim.

In the past (and actually still today) there were some pretty dodgy products out there trying to pass themselves off as good enough for skating. They were relatively affordable but they just plain did not work very well and kids using them really struggled. I have seen this myself when my 2 children were coming up through minor hockey and training on poor quality synthetic ice.

Well guess what? Today - despite some excellent products on the market, there are still a lot of really poor products being sold. They make ridiculous claims that can't be backed up. It seems anyone with access to buying cutting board stock plastic can have them machined into skating panels and sold as synthetic ice for a cheaper price. Well eventually the marketplace will sort that out, but in the meantime the industry suffers from the bad reputation of poor products.

Excellent synthetic ice products are not inexpensive per se. That said - they are a viable and tremendous alternative to spending millions on a mechanically refrigerated ice surface (and building), they can be used inside or outside year around, and the maintenance is restricted to periodic cleaning and application of glide enhancement at regular intervals. Indeed, they are environmentally friendly as well. Want to green up your community? Install a synthetic ice surface.

Only a select few products on the market today (2 or 3 of them) are engineered for the sole purpose of skating; they have no other practical use. If users could only have better access to the best products they would soon realize how good these products work.

If you are really interested in getting a high quality synthetic ice surface in your community then contact some companies selling the best products and see if they will agree to work with you on a pilot project basis. Although pilot projects can cost the supplier money, they are generally anxious to have their product seen as often as possible - the community gets to test it out and the synthetic ice company gets to promote their product.

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