HB 883

Department of Legislative Services

Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 883 (Delegate A. Miller, *et al.*)
Ways and Means

Public Schools - Synthetic Turf Fields - Informational Signs

This bill requires public elementary or secondary schools that have a synthetic turf field on property owned by a local government or school system that is used for school activities to post a sign – in a conspicuous location – advising users of the field to take recommended precautions.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill applies only to local governments.

Local Effect: Potential minimal increase in expenditures for any local school systems that own or operate a synthetic infill turf field and must acquire and post the required signage. Revenues are not affected. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The required sign must state the following:

"All those using this synthetic turf field should take the following recommended precautions:

1. Keep beverages closed and in bags or coolers when not drinking to minimize contamination from field dust and fibers.

2. Be aware of the signs of heat-related illness and dehydration. This field can get excessively hot on warm, sunny days. Take all necessary precautions.

3. Wash hands and exposed body parts aggressively after using this field.

4. Remove shoes and clothing as soon as possible after using this field to avoid tracking dust and infill to other locations."

Current Law: Current law does not require the posting of any safety recommendations specific to synthetic infill turf fields.

Background: Most synthetic turf fields are constructed with several layers of material including a drainage layer, a backing system, and a top layer of synthetic turf. Synthetic infill turf fields have a man-made topsoil-like material interspersed into the blades of synthetic turf or into the backing to add cushioning and stability. Infill is generally made from either a combination of fine sand and granulated rubber or granulated rubber by itself, sometimes called crumb rubber or tire crumb. Granulated rubber is largely derived from recycled tires. Synthetic infill turf fields continue to grow in popularity as improved products offer longer lasting and better performing surfaces for recreation.

However, in recent years, the public has become increasingly concerned about public health risks from infill materials. In 2008, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a statement regarding testing conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services that revealed potentially unhealthy levels of lead dust in some artificial turf playing fields in New Jersey. CDC advised at the time that the risk for harmful lead exposure is low from new fields with elevated lead levels in their turf fibers because the fibers are still intact; however, as the turf ages and weathers, lead is released in dust, and the risk for harmful exposure increases.

In 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a report based on a limited 2008 study on recycled tire rubber use in recreational spaces. The report and study focused on feasible and accurate methods for monitoring and generating data to help EPA assess the safety of rubber infill use in recreational fields. EPA concluded that its extraction and collection methods were reliable and that average concentrations of dangerous components were low enough that they did not pose a public health threat. However, EPA also concluded that, due to the high variability in the sample sites, these results cannot be extrapolated to additional recreational spaces that contain tire crumb.

In January 2016, EPA, CDC, and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announced a multi-agency action plan to study key environmental health questions related to the use of synthetic turf fields. The announcement acknowledged growing public concern with the safety of turf fields. The plan includes data and knowledge gap analysis; outreach to stakeholders; testing of tire crumb to characterize chemicals, potential emissions, and toxicity; and other related activities. The agencies anticipate releasing a preliminary report by the end of 2016.

The Synthetic Turf Council, a Georgia-based nonprofit that represents the industry, states that many studies and independent sources have confirmed that synthetic turf is safe and that no one has ever reported ill effects from synthetic turf or crumb rubber. Further, the Synthetic Turf Council asserts that, after the 2008 tests in New Jersey found elevated lead levels on synthetic turf fields, the industry switched to a nonlead pigment.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Similar bills have been introduced each year since 2013. HB 897 of 2015 and HB 763 of 2014 each received a hearing in the House Health and Government Operations Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 1262 of 2013 was withdrawn after a hearing by the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Department of Legislative Services

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