

HB1547: Environment – Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill – Producer Responsibility

Committee: Economic Matters

Hearing Date: February 19th, 2020

Lead Sponsor: Delegate Mary Lehman

Position: SUPPORT

Submitted by Amanda Farber, Safe Healthy Playing Fields, INC

I write today on behalf of Safe Healthy Playing Fields INC to ask you for a favorable report for HB1547. Our nonprofit organization is part of a broad coalition which has spent the past ten years advocating for safe, healthy, and fiscally and environmentally responsible play surfaces for children and athletes. I personally am also a mom of two sport playing teens and my background is in pediatric occupational therapy.

The problems with artificial turf range from excessive heat, hardness, toxicity, turf burn, torque injuries, concussions, pollution, costs, to the reason why this bill is needed...disposal.

It is time for the synthetic turf industry to be held accountable for their product through extended producer responsibility and stewardship. Maryland can be a leader on this increasingly important and impactful issue.

The industry and Synthetic Turf Council have admitted that these fake fields - made from petroleum-based plastic and tire waste or other infills - generate an “ENORMOUS” amount of material that must be handled at the end of their limited “lives.”



(Removed artificial turf – going away, to the dump, or to be “recycled” depending who you ask....)

Over this past year, I have personally taken “field trips” to observe and document over 15 synthetic turf fields being removed and installed in just my local area alone. Countless other synthetic turf fields in Maryland are near the end of their lives, unsafe, and falling apart. This isn’t just an enormous amount of material; we are facing an ever-growing synthetic turf tsunami.

When I asked contractors where exactly the used removed turf was going, the most common answer I received was “away.” The second most common answer was “the dump. It is hard to get straight answers even when it is our public tax dollars paying for a project.



(Old synthetic turf dumped in White Marsh; synthetic turf rolls and tire waste by a dumpster in Bethesda, MD)

For many years the synthetic turf industry has marketed themselves as “responsible stewards of the environment,” claimed that these fields were “100% recyclable,” and even guaranteed a “Take Back” program - which has instead become a game of “No Give Backs.”

Now the industry says it is up to the end user to determine the fate of the material - but with no regulations, zero transparency, many false claims of “recycling” in the US and abroad, and repeated examples of dumping, they have turned their profit into our problem.

Schools, parks, jurisdictions, taxpayers, and the planet are all left with the burden and paying the price – financially and environmentally - because there are no regulations.

The world is finally waking up to the unsustainable problems with plastic. Recent national and international news reports have revealed the alarming extent of the problems with synthetic turf disposal. An irresponsible industry will of course suggest that the disposal is the responsibility of the end user, knowing full well that there is currently no good solution.

One school system in Maryland, Montgomery County Public Schools, learned about irresponsible synthetic turf disposal the hard way last year when the “recycled” material ended up put down and dumped 50 miles away by Bird River in White Marsh. That same school system is now shipping 40,000 pounds of used heavily shedding plastic synthetic turf rolls from another field to Malaysia, hoping on a wing and a prayer that it will be dealt with responsibly 10,000 miles away when it is out of sight. Note that neither the industry association nor the company involved has been willing to answer even the most basic questions about this process.

The industry clearly requires regulation to move beyond their marketing myths to actual accountability. HB1547 is a right and reasonable step in that direction. And again, Maryland can lead the way.

Amanda Farber
Safe Healthy Playing Fields, INC

For more information see:

Safe Healthy Playing Fields website: <https://www.safehealthyplayingfields.org>

The Atlantic: *The Dangerous Pileup of Artificial Turf*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/12/artificial-turf-fields-are-piling-no-recycling-fix/603874/>

Washington Times: *Old Turf Fields Raise Environmental, Health Concerns*

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/nov/30/paper-old-turf-fields-raise-environmental-health-c/>

Zembla: *The Artificial Turf Mountain* <https://youtu.be/Y5o3J7uy4Tk>



(Workers attempting to shake out the tire waste and silica sand from the synthetic turf at Walter Johnson HS; the school system is using a company that claims to ship the plastic carpet to Malaysia for "recycling." February 2020)

