



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

[www.womensdemocraticclub.org](http://www.womensdemocraticclub.org)

**House Bill 1547 - Environment - Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill - Producer Responsibility  
Economic Matters Committee – February 19, 2020**

**SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)**. My name is Diana Conway and I am the president of WDC -- one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with more than 600 politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

HB1547 is one of WDC's seven Priority Bills for the 2020 session. This legislation will correct a significant and harmful regulatory gap for how used synthetic turf fields and their infill ("synturfs") may be disposed of. It establishes two straightforward requirements, placing them on those best positioned to handle them: the producers.

- First, it requires synturf producers to develop a stewardship plan to be filed with the Department of the Environment.
- Second, it requires producers to create a chain of custody to assure transparency and accountability in the execution of the stewardship plan.

We believe that producers are best positioned to be responsible for these two requirements because they can assess how any regulatory burdens or costs will affect them and modify their products, marketing etc. accordingly.

As things stand today the owners of used synturfs, usually municipalities, schools or parks, are left to figure out what to do with 250 tons of mixed plastic waste. They are ill-equipped to do so: synturf's sheer volume and weight are daunting, and its composition adds to the problems. Old synturf is composed of scores of large rolled-up plastic carpets, typically mixed with 40-50,000 shredded waste tires and dozens of tons of silica. (While intact tires are tightly regulated, *shredded* tires are exempt under federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act [RCRA] law.) If they were properly maintained, the carpet and infill have been repeatedly treated with flame retardants, static suppressant, and biocides and fungicides to handle the sweat, blood, vomit, snot, spit, feces and urine that would break down on grass. Several counties' municipal waste facilities have said they would not accept this weight, volume and mixture of waste. So where *should* it go?

WDC's interest in synturf and the disposal problem is based on these concerns:

- Synturfs present a **disposal nightmare**, every 7-10 years for every synturf. Europe identified this problem years ago. A Frontline-style TV investigation called "*The Turf Mountain*"<sup>1</sup> made the case again recently with startling coverage and images: mountains of piled carpet and towering piles of infill with the clarity and power unique to video.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5o3J7uy4Tk>



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- Synturf is more **expensive** than a quality grass field, when responsible disposal is included along with other costs that synturf producers typically minimize. An accurate view of costs must encompass original installation, maintaining synturf to warranty-mandated standards, and every 7-10 years the full life-cycle costs for removal, replacement, shock pads, and **safe, appropriate disposal**. (There is no equivalent cost for grass fields beyond installation and maintenance.) The synturf industry engages in frequent **suppression of disposal costs**, typically through non-disclosure at time of contract.

So, as jurisdictions around the US are pulling out the first generation of synturf they often quietly dump or 'store' old synturf –predictably in rural or low-income communities. This is demonstrably true. Two months ago, *The Atlantic*, *Salon* and *Maryland Matters* all re-published "**Fields of Waste**,"<sup>2</sup> an investigative report documenting the massive accumulation of used synturfs all over the US. Each of these publications found the reporting sufficiently robust --and the issue sufficiently important-- to reprint it with descriptors like "Mounting Disposal Mess" and "Piling Up – No Recycling Fix. The images of the volume of waste are jaw-dropping. The *Maryland Matters* edition includes photos of synturf being moved in May 2018 from a high school in my own Montgomery County to the side of Bird River in Baltimore County where it remained as of just a few months ago. This cannot be allowed to continue.

It is telling that these articles, released exactly two months ago, have been met with silence. The named companies, so unflatteringly depicted, have taken **no legal action** or other steps to rebut or challenge the reporting.

- WDC believes this artificially-low cost of synturf **harms Marylanders**-- the sod farms, laborers, contractors and services affiliated with that Maryland-centric industry. HB 1547 will create a transparent and accurate disposal price structure with a plan for its retirement that protects communities from improper dumping and tells buyers what the real costs of the options are. Most of the economic benefits of synturf flow out-of-state and often out-of-country, while the burdens are felt by our Maryland businesses and communities.
- Synturf's **toxicity to athletes** during its 7-10 year use is significant. Independent studies confirm that synturf typically contains hundreds of chemicals like **lead** and **mercury**, with up to 52 **carcinogens** plus endocrine disruptors, an asbestos-twin (CNTs) that was specifically recognized as a **liability issue** by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, and scores of other harmful chemicals to which our children are exposed—without disclosure or consent. Athletes are exposed through inhalation, ingestion and dermal uptake, sometimes almost daily, possibly from pre-K through college.

<sup>2</sup> (1) <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/21/fields-of-waste-artificial-turf-becomes-mounting-disposal-mess/>

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

(3) [https://www.salon.com/2019/12/21/artificial-turf-touted-as-recycling-fix-for-millions-of-scrap-tires-becomes-mounting-disposal-mess\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2019/12/21/artificial-turf-touted-as-recycling-fix-for-millions-of-scrap-tires-becomes-mounting-disposal-mess_partner/)



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- Synturf's **toxic load on our environment** stems from largely unregulated run-off and the leaching of the chemical stew listed above into the soil and water of our communities. This occurs over the course of a field's 'life' and upon being dumped or "stored."
- Synturf has dramatically higher **concussion** rates and **foot-ankle-ACL injury** rates. These facts are irrefutably established by large, multi-year independent, peer-reviewed, published medical studies, not affiliated with any trade group or economic interest.
- Synturf's dramatic **heat** can reach into the 160s and 170s across the DC metro area on warm sunny days leading to exertional heat stroke like Jordan McNair, plus melted shoes and blistered feet and hands. This heat further harms our children and our environment by promoting the aerosolization of the chemicals in synturf.

These are the grounds for WDC's concerns about synturf and for our support of HB1547. WDC supports grass fields but to be clear, HB1547 does not dictate what a school district or parks department chooses to install. What this bill does is simply require that upon sale of a synturf the producer must have a plan for its disposal at removal. Presumably those costs will be reflected to buyers, until they are mitigated or eliminated.

Absent any recycling the easiest disposal option now available for used synturf remains dumping. The result is a staggering amount of used synturf waste – just dumped -- across our state and nation. Producers have a unique responsibility for this problem and are uniquely positioned to address it.

WDC urges Maryland to lead on this issue. We ask the Committee to place synturf's disposal burden where it belongs and take it off the backs of communities and municipalities least able to manage this waste or affect how it is produced. That burden rightly belongs on producers.

**We ask for your support for HB1547 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.**

Respectfully,

Diana Conway  
President