



Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment
Testimony on: HB0457 - Environment - Synthetic Turf - Chain of Custody
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 20, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB0457. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of nearly 30 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB0457.

First introduced in the 1960s, the number of synthetic turf fields has continued to rise. Without a tracking system, there are no hard data on the number of fields in the U.S., but there is general agreement the number is [around 15,000](#) existing field sites. Many of these field sites have seen multiple cycles of removal and replacement. Used synthetic turf fields are piled up across the US, but the number, locations, and conditions remain completely unknown.

HB0457 establishes a simple chain of custody requirement to track synthetic turf fields in Maryland as they are installed or removed. By building transparency across the installation, removal, and transfer of each synthetic turf field, Maryland can deter their improper disposal and prevent contamination of soil and water with the material's known harmful chemicals.

HB0457 sets up an online reporting system under the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). The burdens for reporting parties are minimal - just submitting an online report. There are no fees or permits. However, the benefits are significant; the assurance that the mounting synthetic turf field waste issue is addressed responsibly and transparently, and that contamination of water and soil with synthetic turf chemical and microplastics are prevented.

Used synthetic turf fields are a major waste challenge for two reasons: 1) their physical volume and weight, and 2) the known toxicity load. [In terms of volume](#), a single field is about 400 tons of bulky, mixed plastic waste and infill. A standard field is two acres of plastic 'carpet,' with one billion plastic blades that are shed over the life of the field. The infill is typically made of pulverized tires, with about 40,000 tires per field. The finely-ground tire bits are highly mobile, as are newer infills made of other materials.

Maryland already has [over 430 plastic fields](#) identified by the MD Sierra Club, and many more remain uncounted. There is a growing understanding of the amount of microplastic debris from this volume of waste material. The sheer [scale of so much waste](#) makes it all the more important to address. Without a method to track the installation and disposal of synthetic fields, no one knows where they are or where they will go. There currently is [no regulation on disposal of synthetic turf](#) when fields are removed after their 8-12 year useful life. HB0457 provides a tracking tool to address these concerns with minimal burden.

In terms of toxicity, there are considerable risks posed by improper synthetic field disposal, including contamination from known chemicals in the plastic carpet and infill. These risks are well-recognized by [leading scientific and medical institutions](#). As this Committee [has heard before](#), contaminants include [carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, heavy metals](#), the [forever chemicals PFAS](#), and [microplastic contamination](#) which leach into soil and waterways.

HB457 addresses this problem for Maryland by establishing a simple chain of custody for any synthetic turf field: 1) tell MDE where your field is with a simple online filing and 2) tell MDE via an online filing who the next custodian is when the field is removed. Once the material is transferred, the reporting requirement shifts to the next custodian. There is no MDE approval, permit, or fee.

In light of the rising number of synthetic turf fields in Maryland, HB0457 is a common-sense way to prevent environmental contamination from synthetic turf chemicals and microplastic debris. We strongly support HB0457 and urge a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.



Old synthetic fields in various locations including [in Virginia](#), and [in Pennsylvania](#), site of a promised recycling facility since 2020 that has yet to break ground and has generated [multiple PA DEP citations](#).

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Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry
Chesapeake Earth Holders
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Climate Parents of Prince George's
Climate Reality Project
ClimateXChange – Rebuild Maryland Coalition
Coming Clean Network, Union of Concerned Scientists

DoTheMostGood Montgomery County
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Elders Climate Action
Fix Maryland Rail
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
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