

HB 457 SUPPORT • Environment – Synthetic Turf – Chain of Custody • February 16, 2024

Dear Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

I share these comments today in **support** of *HB 457- Synthetic Turf - Chain of Custody*, sponsored by Delegates Lehman et al. I am an environmental and human health advocate who has worked on pollution and water quality issues for more than twenty years. In the last ten years, I have guided athletes, sports officials, parents, and community members in making safer personal choices to protect themselves and their family members who play on synthetic turf. I am also a certified girls lacrosse official and league assigner. I work games on synthetic turf because I wholeheartedly support girls playing sports, but this year may be my last, primarily because of the surface on which we are forced to work and play. **Synthetic turf is fraught with so many issues that deserve the attention of capable people, starting with its components and the effect they have on humans and environment as they deteriorate over time.**

### Disposal Pollution

In 2017, Albemarle County, Virginia, was polluted by the dumping of **more than 200 tons** of discarded synthetic turf fields from a replacement project completed by the University of Virginia. The discarded synthetic turf was rolled up, driven truckload after truckload into rural Albemarle County by a contractor, and dumped on a hillside above a stream.

When nearby residents first noticed it, the landowner had it moved to a more private site, where it was partially buried. When it was found



Page 1 Images courtesy of Virginia DEQ

again a few months later, the landowner was cited for an illegal dump, and **the portion of the waste synthetic turf that was recoverable** was taken to a landfill. I have reviewed waste receipts for 199 tons of recovered material for this specific project and it is certain that a considerable quantity of it remains buried.

To be clear, a traditional landfill is NOT an appropriate outcome for contaminated plastic waste and pollutants, but Virginia does not have a better mechanism in place with which to handle this mess, nor does Virginia record the magnitude of synthetic turf waste in which it traffics, internally or received from external sources (MD sends turf waste to VA).

When no information is gathered, bad actors continue to act badly. However, **chain of custody requirements enable good actors to succeed in the marketplace and reinforce responsible behavior in all jurisdictions.** Citizens and legislators have information to protect their families and

important natural resources from the damaging pollution from synthetic turf waste. **Maryland can be a leader in reinforcing good business practices AND environmental protection at the same time.**

### **Routine Daily Pollution**

Synthetic turf is **constantly shedding particles**, including crumb rubber or other infills and pieces of the plastic grass “blades” from its matting.

This picture is of my bag and shoes after working a lacrosse game on synthetic turf in April 2022. All of my personal items, and most of my body, was coated with shreds of green plastic, crumb rubber, and toxic dust as I left the field.



Green plastic shreds on my gear. Image by Kate Mallek.

This **endocrine-disrupting and cancer causing pollution** is left like a trail of breadcrumbs when players and personnel depart the field, get in their cars, and return to their homes. Please imagine the amount that falls from and blows out of trucks along roadways, sidewalks, and into drainage ditches to waterways as hundred of tons of deteriorating synthetic carpet and loose crumb rubber infill waste is transported to destinations for dumping. **Communities deserve that we keep track of this waste and its movement. Plastic is not benign.**

Synthetic turf is an **ecological nightmare** that keeps on giving in every community in which it is installed or dumped. **Forever chemicals remain damaging for generations, causing chronic diseases, birth defects, and longterm environmental and wildlife damage.** Infills containing heavy metals and various cancer-causing substances easily wash away in heavy rains, with potential to threaten streams, rivers, and drinking water far from their original location.

### **Progress in Maryland**

With HB 457, the State of Maryland has a great opportunity to **serve citizens, communities, and environmental health** by providing **transparent** information about synthetic turf installation, transportation, and fate.

Holding producers, installers, owners, and transporters of synthetic turf products properly to account for the full life cycle of these products **places the burden appropriately onto the entities who make money from the product.** Extended producer responsibility is the logical way that manufacturing should account to communities in a reasonable society. At a bare minimum, citizens deserve transparent information. With HB 457, you can discourage and ultimately prevent irresponsible dumping happening in your communities in Maryland. **You may also hope to discourage irresponsible dumping in neighboring states, like Virginia and Pennsylvania, where Maryland often sends its synthetic turf at the end of its useful life.**

**Maryland can do this!** HB 457 will help corporate actors and manufacturers to fulfill their promises to provide more reliable information. HB 457 will help school systems and municipalities to assess and verify that they are choosing upstanding and accountable vendors. HB 457 will help buyers, owners, and decision makers to avoid improper handling of materials in their districts, which can cause significant embarrassment along with human and environmental consequences.

HB 457 is a good choice for Maryland. Thank you for your consideration. **Please support HB 457 for transparency and chain of custody for synthetic turf.** Thank you for your time.

Kate Mallek • Albemarle County, Virginia