



CLIMATE COALITION Montgomery County, MD

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB457 – Environment – Synthetic Turf – Chain of Custody
Organization: Climate Coalition Montgomery County
Submitting: Karl Held
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 16, 2024

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and honorable members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB457. The Climate Coalition of Montgomery County, a coalition of over 20 grassroots organizations focused on climate and the environment, urges you to vote favorably on HB457.

This bill establishes a simple chain of custody for synthetic turf fields, to track fields 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.

HB457 sets up an online reporting system under the Maryland Department of the Environment. The burdens to reporting parties are minimal: Just an online report. There are no fees or permits. The benefits are significant: The assurance that this mounting waste issue is addressed responsibly and transparently, to prevent contamination of Marylanders' water and soil from the chemical and microplastic load presented by synthetic turf fields.

Used synthetic turf fields are a major waste challenge for two reasons: First, due to their physical volume and weight, and second, because of the known toxicity load presented in these synthetic fields.

[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 shed out](#) 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. The [scale of so much waste](#) makes it all the more important to address it directly. Without a method to track fields, no one knows where they are -- or where they will go. There is also a growing understanding of microplastic debris that could be generated from this volume of plastic waste material.

There is currently [no regulation on disposal of synthetic turf](#) when fields are removed after their 8-12 year useful life. HB457 is a tool to address these concerns in a minimally restrictive fashion.

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

Synthetic turf was first introduced in the 1960s. Since then, the number of fields has continued to rise. In the absence of tracking systems like that proposed in HB457, there are no hard numbers available on how many fields there are in the U.S., but there is general agreement the number is [around 15,000](#) existing field sites. Many of those field-sites have seen multiple cycles of removal and replacement. These used fields are piled up across the U.S., but how many, where and under what conditions remains completely unknown.

HB457 addresses this problem for Maryland by establishing a chain of custody for any synthetic turf field:

- Tell MDE where your field is with a simple online filing.
- When the field is removed, tell MDE who the next custodian is.

At that point the reporting requirement shifts to the next custodian. The process does not require any kind of approval, permit or fee.

HB457 is a sensible, low-burden method of preventing contamination from chemicals in synthetic turf and from microplastic debris, in light of the rising number of synthetic turf fields in Maryland. Accordingly, we recommend a **FAVORABLE report for HB457**.

Respectfully,

Karl Held
for the Climate Coalition, Montgomery County

Climate Coalition Member Organizations

ACQ Climate (Ask the Climate Question)

Bethesda Green

Biodiversity for a Livable Climate

Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church

Friends of Sligo Creek

Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Silver Spring

Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

Montgomery Countryside Alliance

One Montgomery Green

Safe Healthy Playing Fields

Sugarloaf Citizens' Association

The Climate Mobilization Montgomery County

Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

Zero Waste Montgomery County

The MCPS Richard Montgomery HS field was moved to a paintball facility beside Bird River in 2018:



Photos

provided by SHPFI

Old synthetic fields in various location 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](#):

