



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB0457 - Environment – Synthetic Turf – Chain of Custody

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 16, 2024

Bill Contact: Delegate Mary Lehman

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with members in all districts in Montgomery County as well as several nearby jurisdictions. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep all residents healthy and safe in a clean environment and that address equity for all residents in our communities. DTMG strongly supports HB0457 because it will provide transparency about where synthetic turf fields are in Maryland and how their toxic waste is disposed at the end of their life.

Synthetic turf fields are made from rolls of plastic “grass” blades weighed down and filled in with hundreds of thousands of pounds of “infill” made from shredded waste tires, silica sand, and/or alternative plastic particles. A standard field is two acres of plastic ‘carpet,’ with one billion plastic blades that shed out over the life of the field. The Maryland Sierra Club has identified more than 430 plastic fields in Maryland, but many more remain uncounted.

The removal and replacement cycle for plastic synthetic turf fields is typically every eight to twelve years. This results in a huge amount of toxic waste. A single field contains about 400 tons of bulky, mixed plastic waste and infill full of carcinogens, chemicals that are endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, PFAS forever chemicals, and microplastic contamination that can leach into our soil and waterways.

The problem is that we don’t know what happens to the synthetic turf fields or their toxic waste at the end of their life. There is no recycling of synthetic turf in US, and local, national, and international media outlets have covered the growing problem of synthetic turf waste. Anne Arundel, Prince George’s, and Montgomery County municipal solid waste facilities report they would decline used synthetic turfs due to volume and weight. There are also no state or federal regulations for safe disposal of synthetic turf or its infill, and there are many documented examples of irresponsible disposal – including dumping the material in lower-income communities. In a 2019 Maryland legislative hearing on disposal of synthetic turf, the president of the leading trade group, the Synthetic Turf Council (STC), acknowledged that there are no laws or regulations regarding the disposal of synthetic turf. The STC itself recommends end-of-life chain of custody certification and describes the disposal issue as “enormous” and “challenging.”

HB0457 will begin to address this important and growing problem by requiring the custodian of each synthetic turf sports and playing field to report relevant information about the field, including its location, manufacturer, size, brand, area, and weight, to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) through an online report. Similar information will need to be reported each time a synthetic turf field is installed, removed, reused, or disposed. The reporting requirement is a simple, non-burdensome data-point. There are no fees and no requirement for any approval from government.

Stakeholders and citizens should be able to access a chain of custody showing what happens to the material. The STC's own guidelines support this goal. STC and individual firms have long claimed to be good stewards who aim for repurposing, reusing, and recycling. This is their chance to show their commitment to our communities and the environment. The reporting will also assure buyers they are dealing with an honest, transparent, accountable vendor.

Maryland is not alone in facing a growing synthetic turf problem. Enacting HB0457 is an important opportunity to get a handle on the extent of the problem so we can move toward a solution. By establishing a simple chain of custody for synthetic turf fields, to track fields as they are installed or removed, Maryland can deter their improper disposal and prevent contamination of soil and water from the material's known harmful chemicals.

In light of the rising number of synthetic turf fields in Maryland, HB0457 is a sensible, low-burden method of preventing contamination from chemicals in synthetic turf and from microplastic debris. Therefore, DTMG strongly supports HB0457 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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