

Department of Legislative Services

Maryland General Assembly

2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 897

(Delegate A. Miller, *et al.*)

Health and Government Operations

Public Health - Synthetic Infill Turf Fields - Informational Signs

This bill requires the owner or operator of a facility with a synthetic infill turf field to post a sign – in a conspicuous location and visible to users of the field – stating specified safety recommendations of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal increase in expenditures for any State agencies that own or operate a synthetic infill turf field and must acquire and post the required signage. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Potential minimal increase in expenditures for any local governments that own or operate a synthetic infill turf field and must acquire and post the required signage. Enforcement can be handled with existing budgeted resources, assuming it is complaint-based only. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The required sign must state the following:

“The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene encourages all those using synthetic infill turf fields to observe the following recommendations:

1. Wash hands and exposed body parts aggressively after playing on field.

2. Turn clothes inside out as soon as possible after using the field to avoid tracking dust and infill to other locations.
3. Keep beverages closed and in bags or coolers when not drinking to minimize contamination from field dust and fibers.
4. Be aware of signs of heat-related illness and dehydration. Fields can get excessively hot on warm, sunny days. Take all necessary precautions.”

Current Law: Current law does not require the posting of any safety recommendations specific to synthetic infill turf fields.

Background: Most synthetic turf fields are constructed with several layers of material including a drainage layer, a backing system, and a top layer of synthetic turf. Synthetic infill turf fields have a man-made topsoil-like material interspersed into the blades of synthetic turf or into the backing to add cushioning and stability. Infill is generally made from either a combination of fine sand and granulated rubber or granulated rubber by itself, sometimes called crumb rubber or tire crumb. Granulated rubber is largely derived from recycled tires. Synthetic infill turf fields continue to grow in popularity as improved products offer longer-lasting and better-performing surfaces for recreation.

However, in recent years, the public has become increasingly concerned about public health risks from infill materials. In 2008, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a statement regarding testing conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services that revealed potentially unhealthy levels of lead dust in some artificial turf playing fields in New Jersey. CDC advised that the risk for harmful lead exposure is low from new fields with elevated lead levels in their turf fibers because the fibers are still intact; however, as the turf ages and weathers, lead is released in dust and the risk for harmful exposure increases.

In 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a report based on a limited 2008 study on recycled tire rubber use in recreational spaces. The report and study focused on feasible and accurate methods for monitoring and generating data to help EPA assess the safety of rubber infill use in recreational fields. EPA concluded that its extraction and collection methods were reliable and that average concentrations of dangerous components were low enough that they did not pose a public health threat. However, EPA also concluded that, due to the high variability in the sample sites, these results cannot be extrapolated to additional recreational spaces that contain tire crumb. EPA is considering future studies to develop more comprehensive and widely applicable testing methods and results regarding tire crumb use in recreational spaces.

The Synthetic Turf Council, a Georgia-based nonprofit that represents the industry, states that many studies and independent sources have confirmed that synthetic turf is safe and that no one has ever reported ill effects from synthetic turf or crumb rubber. Further, the Synthetic Turf Council asserts that, after the 2008 tests in New Jersey found elevated lead levels on synthetic turf fields, the industry switched to a nonlead pigment.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 763 of 2014 received a hearing in the House Health and Government Operations Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 1262 of 2013 was withdrawn after a hearing by the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Kent, Montgomery, and Washington counties; Baltimore City; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland Municipal League; University System of Maryland; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; *A Scoping-Level Field Monitoring Study of Synthetic Turf Fields and Playgrounds*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Synthetic Turf Council; Department of Legislative Services

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