



Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB 321: “Environment - Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill - Chain of Custody”

Lead Sponsor Senator Cheryl Kagan

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 2, 2022

I submit this testimony in support of SB 321 on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the ecological restoration of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, with members in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties. We want to see this urban treasure safely enjoyed by wildlife, our families, and generations to come. We began to raise the alarm about the pollution potential of artificial turf as early as 2009.

SB 321 establishes tracking and reporting requirements for producers and owners of “synthetic turf” and “turf infill” sold, distributed, and installed in Maryland. It requires submission of chain of custody information to MDE, where it can be accessed by the public on a website to be established by MDE.

Our state now has more than a decade of experience with synthetic turf fields. Many have already worn out, been disposed of, and have been replaced—requiring another disposal down the line. Disposal of these plastic carpets is highly problematic because of the mixture of different types of plastic, toxic PFAS chemicals, and usually tire crumb. The fields cannot effectively be recycled. The Sierra Club has done extensive research into the magnitude of the problem, revealing the volume and tonnage of artificial turf now installed and thus requiring disposal. Disposal where? The Sierra Club notes Prince George’s County will not accept these materials at landfills. Montgomery will not accept them for incineration or recycling. If they arrive at the Transfer Station, they are charged a \$70 per ton fee (~ \$15,000 per field, plus transport cost) and sent to a landfill in Virginia. So these plastic carpets and infill are often simply dumped on private or public land.

The volume of artificial turf subject to disposal, carefully calculated by the Sierra Club, is staggering and especially concerning because run off from this material has been shown to kill aquatic life.¹ In Montgomery County alone, the Sierra Club counted 62 fields for a total tonnage of 10,435.2 tons, consisting of 3,794,606 square feet of carpet and 18,973 cubic yards of infill. All of this must go somewhere when in 8 to 10 years from installation it has deteriorated to the point of being too hazardous to play on. Within the Montgomery County portion of the watershed whose waters we seek to protect, there are at least 5 such fields covering 327,578 square feet (7.5 acres) of what was previously pervious land. That amounts to about 55 30-yard dumpsters just of infill and 901 *tons* of plastic carpet and infill threatening our water quality during their useful lives, and then needing disposal somewhere.

SB 321, by establishing a chain of custody, would at least enable the state and citizens to track where these fields are installed and where they go for disposal. That public accountability should help to persuade users to dispose of them legally. Neighbors of the Northwest Branch fully supports the Sierra Club's testimony and would accept an amendment that at the end of the warranty period, the owner of the field rather than the producer becomes the responsible party.

We respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 321. It will help our state manage responsible disposal of these non-biodegradable carpets and may encourage those concerned with fiscal and environmental costs to choose instead sustainable, healthy, cost effective durable natural surfaces.



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¹ See: <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/50/25156>. Artificial turf infill associated with systematic toxicity in an amniote vertebrate and <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/puyallup-tribe-poised-to-sue-over-artificial-turf-spill-in-puyallup-river-harm-to-salmon/>.