

Testimony in support of HB0857

Good afternoon Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein, and other Environment and Transportation Committee members,

The Safe Healthy Playing Fields Incorporated, a grass-roots organization formed more than a dozen years ago in Montgomery County which has since grown into a nationwide organization and represents hundreds of communities and thousands of concerned parents and activists across the country, **strongly supports HB0857**, the bill that would require manufacturers and owners of synthetic turf and turf infill to report chain of custody of the turf and infill for reuse, recycling, or final disposal.

Each and every used synthetic turf field contains tens of thousands of pounds of chemical-laden plastic and hundreds of thousands of pounds of granulated infill (usually tire waste, or alternative infills, and silica sand). According to the Synthetic Turf Council, the industry's leading association, one thousand deconstructed fields per year in the U.S. represent 80 million square feet of turf carpet weighing 40 million pounds and 400 million pounds of infill.

Given those numbers, it is astounding to realize there are no regulations for reuse, recycling, or disposal of synthetic turf components. Used synthetic turf materials may be landfilled, incinerated, repurposed or dumped in communities which then must deal with the waste.

The synthetic component materials that make up artificial turf carpet systems contain known aquatic and human toxins, carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, carcinogens, and immune disruptors such as PFAS, or "forever chemicals." The direct toxic effects have been demonstrated in aquatic organisms in particular.

Due to a lack of regulations, synthetic turf companies often make bold, unsubstantiated claims regarding reuse, recycling, and disposal of their product at the end of their lifespans, typically a period of 8-10 years.

Numerous examples of irresponsible disposal exist including dumped or stockpiled material in lower income communities (one example - Bird River, Baltimore County). Also, several Maryland municipal waste facilities say they do not accept the volume, weight, and mixture of synthetic turf waste. According to investigative reporting conducted by Fair Warning and published in various media outlets including Salon, the millions of square feet of removed synthetic turf end up in the same place billions of scrap tires went before –to landfills, to rural and urban stockpiles, and millions were "scattered in ravines, deserts, woods, and empty lots." As noted in a 1991 Environmental Protection Agency report, that activity sparked toxic fires that lasted for months. "As costs or difficulties of legal disposal increase, illegal dumping may increase," said the EPA. We now know that nightmare scenario is occurring with disturbing frequency.

The technology for recycling synthetic turf, which involves separating the plastic grass and

backing from the sand and rubber infill is complicated and has not been fully developed, so when a synthetic turf owner wants to do the right thing and tries to recycle, the only option identified has been to send separated parts of the carpeting halfway around the world to an uncertain fate in Malaysia (e.g. from Maryland). You should also know that the Malaysia facility has since stopped accepting synthetic turf after scrutiny was turned on it. To date, “There is one accredited recycling plant for end-of-life turf — it’s in the Netherlands,” according to Maryland Matters.

Right now, municipalities and jurisdictions in Maryland as well as other regions across the country where these plastic carpets are dumped are the same jurisdictions that are forced to deal with the environmental and physical mess **as they have no way of knowing who dumped the used turf without a chain of custody tracking system, as proposed in HB0857.**

Even the Synthetic Turf Council recommends end-of-life chain of custody certification!

With HB0857, Maryland can be a leader to move in the right direction. Stakeholders have the right to know what happens to materials and hold those responsible for the materials accountable through a documented chain of custody reporting. Transparency and accountability regarding synthetic turf disposal must be required.

In summation, **we strongly urge you to favorably report out HB0857.**

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Carol Falk

Founding member, Safe Healthy Playing Fields Incorporated

Resources:

[1] (1) <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/21/fields-of-waste-artificial-turf-becomes-mounting-disposal-mess/>

(2) <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/12/artificial-turf-fields-are-piling-no-recycling-fix/603874/>

(3) https://www.salon.com/2019/12/21/artificial-turf-touted-as-recycling-fix-for-millions-of-scrap-tires-becomes-mounting-disposal-mess_partner/

(4) <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2020/02/20/proposed-legislation-could-see-more-environmentally-friendly-turf-removal/>

[2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5o3J7uy4Tk>

[3] https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.syntheticurfCouncil.org/resource/resmgr/guidelines/STC_Guideline_for_Recycle_Re.pdf

Citations: Fields of Waste, <https://www.fairwarning.org/2019/12/fields-of-waste-artificial-turf-mess/>