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LD 1177

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Moratorium on installing or reinstalling artificial (synthetic) turf and require a study of the public health and environmental risks.

Good day Senators and Representatives of the ENR Committee. I am Kate Manahan of Kennebunk, ME and I am writing to ask you to vote “ought to pass” for the moratorium on installing synthetic turf in Maine for the next three years.

Across the country, communities are gaining steam as they move to protect their communities from synthetic/chemical fields and surfaces. New York State just enacted a moratorium on new installations of synthetic turf, other states and municipalities are following suit, for good reason. Artificial turf is well established as an environmental health issue on a large scale with around 13,000 artificial turf fields in use (in 2019), while we add about 1,500 more a year, nationally. We already know that plastic is bad for health and the environment at every step of the process (production, use, disposal). Even when they call it “virgin” plastic, it still is filled with chemicals including PFAS, phthalates and heavy metals. Do we want this toxic stuff in our bodies, our air, our soils and our ground water and waterways in Maine?

Hold it!—Literally!

What if we could press ‘pause’ on the truly massive amounts of plastic being installed around our state?

We could:

Protect the Children - from huffing hazardous fumes, plastic rug burns that invite MERSA infections, worse lower leg and brain injuries, excessive heat exposure. Children who play on artificial turf are more exposed to the toxic chemicals such as PFAS, heavy metals, and phthalates through inhalation, absorption through skin, and even swallowing.

Protect the Unborn - Some of the compounds used in plasticizers and synthetic grass production act as endocrine disruptors. Even in very small concentrations, the chemicals can mimic the hormones that regulate the endocrine systems of those near them (kids, coaches, refs, maintenance people, neighbors). EDC’s (Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals) add up in our bodies over years (bioaccumulate) and can create problems like changes in estrogen and testosterone levels, thyroid function, metabolism, brain development and learning difficulties for years to come.

Protect the Climate/Environment - Artificial turf heats much more quickly than natural grass and can easily rise to dangerous temperatures, reaching 30 degrees more than a natural grass field. The heat radiating from artificial plastic turf causes high temperatures that exceed the recommended guideline by the American Association of Pediatrics.

Protect the Fish - Along with raising the temperature of the runoff water, artificial turf can release microplastics and contaminate groundwater. Some of the particles look like fish food, bringing microplastics into the food chain. Also, storm water run-off from artificial turf fields has been found to contain zinc. Zinc is poisonous to aquatic life forms.

Protect Vulnerable Populations - Contrary to industry talk about “recycling” artificial grass, old fields are generally cut into pieces and shipped to Louisiana for burning (aka “chemical recycling.”) stashed in local, empty barns or landfilled. That is not recycling. I don’t think it is acceptable to foist our toxic waste products onto the people living in areas historically used as plantations. Along the chemical corridor known as Cancer Alley, the rate of poverty is 19% and 40% of the residents are black. Cancer rates there are nearly double the rest of the country. Dumping our chemical burdens on them amounts to environmental racism. We can’t, in good conscience, add Maine’s plastic waste to that community.

Protect the Taxpayers - if you take out a 10 year bond to pay for a million dollar plastic field that only lasts 9 years, then what do you do when it is time to replace it? It can be cheaper, in the long run, to manage organic grass fields—and way better for the environment, people and wildlife. True, players likely get more playing time on artificial fields, but at what cost? <https://www.turi.org/publications/artificial-turf/>

Could we be more like the National Football League? “The NFL Players Association is advocating for teams to convert artificial practice and game fields to natural grass fields. From NFLPA.com, "In the meantime, we’re fighting on behalf of our players to develop better safety standards and testing methods for artificial turf.”

Even though artificial turf may look like a pretty grass field, it is just plastic! And plastic is bad for us, at every stage of its life span, and ours! A moratorium on field installations would give Maine time to study the environmental health impacts to be sure we are making prudent choices for the people and environments that we hold dear. A modest investment in independent, public-interest research now could save the state and municipalities millions in cleanup, lawsuits, or field replacement down the road. It’s smart governance. Historically, we installed first, and asked questions later.

We’ve seen scenarios like this play out before with lead paint, asbestos, and PFAS in firefighting foam. Let’s take a measured approach.

Please vote Ought To Pass on LD 1177 to afford us the chance to stop and assess before adding more plastic to our lives and the greater environment.

Thank you, sincerely, for your commitment,

Kate Manahan,
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