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INDUSTRY IN A DITHER ABOUT PFAS IN SYNTHETIC TURF

Non-Denials and Trade Secret Claims Prompt More Testing of Carpet

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Washington, DC — Turf industry groups are in a lather about recent reports of PFAS chemicals in artificial turf blades and turf backing by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and the Ecology Center. Previously, public health attention focused on the shredded tire infill but has now extended to chemicals in the plastic “blades” covering the fields. PEER and the Ecology Center have amended their Data Quality Act complaint on EPA’s Synthetic Turf Tire Crumb Rubber Report, reiterating the need for federal agencies to examine the carpet itself.

In September, the Ecology Center, working with PEER, found elemental fluorine in artificial turf blades, suggesting that PFAS is an ingredient in the carpet grass fibers or a byproduct of the manufacturing process. It also found specific PFAS chemicals in discarded turf backing and an adjacent wetland. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), often referred to as “forever chemicals,” do not break down in the environment and bio-accumulate in the food chain. Human exposures to PFAS are associated with cancer, birth defects, and other impairments.

On October 14, 2019, the Synthetic Turf Council put out a statement that did not deny the presence of PFAS but nonetheless blasted the groups’ “inaccurate, non-verified report using questionable test methods.” Yet, it is hard for industry to dispute that –

- Two specific PFAS substances were found in backing of two different turf samples: one had 6:2 FTSA, the other had PFOA from samples taken by three PhD scientists who collected samples using proper lab protocols;
- Shaw Industries, one of the companies that produced the turf that tested positive for elemental fluorine, admits, “These chemicals are commonly used by synthetic turf manufacturers as a non-stick agent... We are exploring alternatives with our technical teams and suppliers but have not yet identified a substitute that provides the non-stick properties required for manufacturing synthetic turf.” (emphasis added); and
- ACTGlobal also concedes it uses a “fluorelastomer process aid” (likely a PFAS) in the manufacture of synthetic grass.

Significantly, the groups can only test for 36 PFAS because widespread claims of “confidential business information” prevent release of data about hundreds of other PFAS compounds.

“We are asking manufacturers to fully disclose all PFAS chemistry used, including fluoropolymers and any other fluorinated processing aids used in the production of turfgrass fibers and backing,” said Jeff Gearhart of the Ecology Center. “Industry continues to claim this chemistry is proprietary, however, the public has a right to know.”

Two big concerns about PFAS in the turf blades and backing is the direct chemical exposure to children, and the potential for PFAS to leach off the fields into groundwater, surface water and eventually, drinking water.

“PFAS in synthetic turf should sound alarm bells for parents and for all municipalities with these fields,” stated PEER Science and Policy Director Kyla Bennett, noting that this is also potentially a huge liability concern for industry. “For the health of our children and communities, we urgently need to take a hard look at PFAS in synthetic turf.”

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[See PEER and the Ecology’s Center amendment to the complaint](#)

[See findings of PFAS in turf](#)

[Look at Synthetic Turf Council statement](#)

[Read Shaw statement on PFAS](#)

[Read ESTC Statement on PFAS](#)

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