

Motion

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Synthetic grass, or artificial turf, is created by fusing together rubber and certain plastics to create the illusion of lush grasses. In recent years, many people have installed artificial turf / synthetic grass for purposes of water conservation, or recreational activity. These artificial fields were so popular, that in states like California, state laws were updated to at one point ensure that these types of products were essential in water saving policy. However, numerous studies have concluded that the use of artificial turf / synthetic grass has several negative environmental impacts.

Artificial turf is now known to contain harmful substances such as polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and other “forever chemicals.” In April 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration, through the Environmental Protection Agency, categorized PFAS and other “forever chemicals” as hazardous substances dangerous to human health. The EPA has concluded that exposure to PFAS may lead to reproductive effects, developmental delays, and risks of some cancers. Exposure can occur through inhalation, ingestion, skin contact, and mucous membrane exposure, including microplastic dust kicked up on artificial turf fields.

Runoff from artificial turf, including tire rubber crumbs and other materials used for cushioning, can cause PFAS and other contaminants to leach into groundwater or runoff into waterways and the ocean, potentially contaminating drinking water. Additionally, additional turf contributes to the urban “heat island” effect, raising local temperatures, while the City is engaged in other efforts to combat urban heat, including cool pavement and increasing the urban forest. Artificial turf does not support life, including insects and birds, and by depriving underlying soil of water, air and light, can kill beneficial organisms in the soil for many years.

In 2023, the State of California enacted SB 676 (Allen), which allows local agencies to prohibit artificial synthetic grass (turf) on residential properties, repealing a previous 2015 state law which had approved artificial grass as a method to save water from irrigation. In fact, several actions have focused on these types of lawns in recent years, such as the 2022 Governor’s order which banned the practice of watering non-functional, or purely decorative artificial / synthetic grass. The Governor’s order provided a potable water statewide estimated savings of between 156,000 acre-feet and 260,000 acre-feet per year, the equivalent of water used by 780,000 households. Unfortunately, decorative lawns cannot be recycled, and are placed in landfills after their use, further allowing chemical deterioration and material breakdown which can find its way into local water sources.

To reduce health and environmental risks from PFAS and other contaminants, the City itself should transition away from future use of synthetic turf or artificial grass, and continue to incentivize the transition towards California drought-friendly landscaping broadly.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council instruct the Chief Legislative Analyst to report with:

- In coordination with the City’s Chief Heat Officer and the Climate Emergency Management Office (CEMO), a summary of policies regarding synthetic grass or artificial turf in jurisdictions with climate and water supply issues analogous to Los Angeles, and their heat impacts citywide;
- Recommendations to effectuate a transition away from future installations of synthetic grass / artificial turf citywide;
- In coordination with the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Department of General Services, an analysis of lifecycle costs (installation, operation and maintenance) for different types of turf surfaces, and recommendations to halt future installation of synthetic grass or

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artificial turf on City-owned property, including athletic fields, and a plan to remove and replace all current synthetic sports fields;

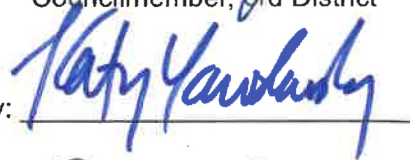
- In coordination with the the Department of Water and Power, recommendations for incentives and rebate programs to remove and replace synthetic turf / artificial grass, and encourage the transition to California friendly landscaping;
- In coordination with the City Administrative Officer, the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Department of General Services, and other impacted departments as needed, report on the budgetary and policy changes needed in order to ensure that all city agencies adhere to the intent of this policy;
- In consultation with the Los Angeles Unified School District, The Los Angeles Community College District, private schools, and commercial properties, provide options and recommendations to incentivize the replacement of synthetic grass or artificial turf on school playgrounds, athletic fields, and other uses
- In coordination with the Department of Water and Power, recommendations to end the practice of watering of synthetic turf / artificial lawns.

Presented By:



Bob Blumenfeld  
Councilmember, 3rd District

Seconded By:



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