

RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION

RECREATION AND PARK DEPARTMENT SYNTHETIC TURF PROGRAM POLICY

RESOLUTION NO. _____
Adopted _____

WHEREAS, In 2004, an independent study commissioned by the Recreation and Park Department, found that San Francisco faced a significant playfield deficit and the City would need 35 additional soccer fields and 30 additional baseball and softball fields to meet general demand which has grown since 2004 as has the City's population; and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco park system provides both synthetic and natural grass fields that together offer over 200,000 hours of play per year; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic turf increases play time by approximately 800 hours per field annually, or approximately 50% more than natural grass fields; and

WHEREAS, In 2026, the Recreation and Park Department operates synthetic turf fields in twelve parks, which together provide more than 35 individual game fields with many overlapping field alignments. These fields account to 16% of baseball and softball fields and 60% of ground sports fields; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic turf fields are amongst the most requested athletic fields by permit holders; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, the Recreation and Park Commission adopted the 2008 Synthetic Playfields Task Force's findings and recommendations for installation and replacement of synthetic turf fields in San Francisco parks; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco's synthetic turf fields are designed and maintained with one goal in mind: to provide safe, durable, and sustainable spaces for year-round recreation. The dedicated turf maintenance team established in April 2017 provides regular and routine maintenance of the turf fields to keep them at a high level of play and maintains the turf warranties; and

WHEREAS, The Recreation and Park Commission acknowledges there are global, national, and locally identified environmental concerns with the use of synthetic turf, including microplastics and PFAS substances, and also the unmet demand for recreation spaces given the City's limited financial and spatial resources; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That this Commission does hereby approve a policy for the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department regarding its synthetic turf program; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, The Recreation and Park Department shall report on implementation of this policy bi-annually in the Department's Capital Expenditure and Operations Plans; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, The policy shall read as follows:

- 1. Select Appropriate Sites:** As recommended by the 2008 Task Force, select sites using priority criteria that targets high use fields where the Department can optimize limited space and maximize play opportunities. Each new site will require approval by the Commission prior to implementation.

Priority criteria include:

- a. Select athletic fields that are consistently difficult to manage and maintain due to the heavy demand and use patterns.

- b. Select athletic fields to optimize and expand playtime by targeting facilities where multiple activities can be incorporated together on the same field.
- c. If appropriate, select sites where new synthetic fields would replace existing asphalt or paved surfaces.
- d. Where viable, geographically distribute fields across the City, so that all residents have equitable recreational resources.
- e. Locate fields in spaces that are not prone to flooding, sites that are above the water table, and sites where drainage will not negatively impact downstream food production sites.
- f. Consult with the Department's Natural Areas Manager on site selection to avoid impacts to the City's natural areas program, including wildlife species, state and federally listed species, and mature trees.

- 2. Protect Human and Environmental Health:** To address human and environmental concerns, the Department will continue engagement with other city agencies, including the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), the San Francisco Environment Department (SFE), the Department of Public Health (DPH) as well as independent third-party environmental consultants systematically in a way that incorporates timely feedback into the delivery of turf fields and ensures appropriate turf testing protocols and procurement requirements.

Prior to each field replacement or installation, the Department shall engage with independent third-party environmental consultants to review current turf procurement specifications and advise on appropriate updates to ensure that the specifications reflect appropriate, current state and federal regulations and testing practices.

Regular consultation with city agencies include:

- a. Annual consultation with SFPUC, SFE, and DPH staff experts to review procurement specifications and implement appropriate modifications.
- b. Refining the existing leachate monitoring program on turf fields with SFPUC to develop local data for informed decision making for future fields.

Turf testing protocols and procurement requirements include:

- a. Requiring full material composition information and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) from manufacturers when purchasing new turf.
- b. Purchasing products that do not contain hazardous levels of lead.
- c. Using only natural infill materials, thus eliminating the use of styrene-butadiene rubber (SBR).
- d. Testing turf material against the current procurement specifications for total/leachable heavy metals, leachable semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), total polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAHs), target leachable per and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS), and total lead content.
- e. Testing natural infill materials for pesticides.
- f. Using turf and infill material without antimicrobial additives.
- g. Requiring written certification from manufacturers that turf does not have added flame retardants.
- h. Sharing manufacturer's information with SFPUC and SFE for review and feedback.

- 3. Effective Maintenance, Replacement and Recycling of Materials:** The Department will commit to on-going, dedicated funding that allows proactive replacement of fields when they reach the end of their useful life, ensuring aging turf removal before turf fibers begin to shed more frequently into the environment. The Department will execute a downstream recycling effort that includes contract specifications that require turf recycling and reduces landfill waste. Recycling synthetic turf is a

developing technology and the Department will continue to explore all viable recycling options as the industry evolves.

Turf maintenance protocols include:

- a. Testing each synthetic field every two years to confirm industry Gigantamax (GMAX) and Head Injury Criterion (HIC) standards are met.
- b. Maintain a dedicated turf maintenance team procedures at the current standards of inspection and regular maintenance. This includes inspecting every field at least twice a month, grooming or sweeping the turf, removing loose fibers, and ensuring that each surface remains in optimal condition for safe, active play.

Turf replacement program includes:

- a. Providing adequate financial and staffing resources to replace fields at the end of their useful life.
- b. Utilizing contracting options such as Cooperative Purchasing Agreements or other effective delivery methods for new and replacement fields.

Turf recycling protocols include:

- a. Commitment to downcycle turf at the end of its useful life through product specification requirements.
- b. Consult with SFE Zero Waste Division on most appropriate recycling options available based on City policies and goals.
- c. Commitment to maintain chain of custody documents for each processed field to be uploaded into the City's online debris tracking system, Green Halo, to comply with Material Reduction and Recovery Play (MRRP) requirements.

4. **Continual Review of Advancing Technology and Regulatory Requirement:** In coordination with other city agencies, the Department is committed to reviewing, tracking and implementing technological innovations and advancements. The Department will continue to push the industry to align products with City goals and policies.

Monitoring synthetic turf technologies and advancements and focused consultation with city agencies includes:

- a. With appropriate City agencies and experts, the Department shall continue to review scientific literature and advances in turf technology to adapt and deliver the best products and practices available.
- b. Continue engaging with SFPUC Storm Water Team on best practices in field drainage design to minimize storm drainage discharge into the City's storm water system.
- c. Continue to engage with SFPUC Water Quality Team on field stormwater leachate test monitoring for fields located over the Westside Groundwater Basin aquifer to inform turf specifications and field design protocols.
- d. Consult with SFE's Zero Waste Division and Toxic Reduction Division to update procurement specifications to meet current city policies and goals, including end-of-product-life recycling programs.

5. **Effective Communication Methods:** The Department will share information on its website to inform the public of the facilities that host synthetic turf programs as well as the Department's Synthetic Turf Program and Policy. Bi-annual reporting will be incorporated as part of the Department's Strategic, Capital Expenditure, and Operations Plans.

- a. Continue to expand upon the existing website: [Park Playfield Repairs and Reconstruction Program](#)
- b. Upload a FAQ document about the Synthetic Turf Program and Policy to the site.

Definitions

GMAX - Gigantamax - Measurement of maximum force that a surface exerts during a fall. Measurement rating for fall protection

HIC - Head Injury Criterion: (Measurement of assessing head injury from a ground impact)

MSDS - Material Safety Data Sheets

SBR - Styrene-butadiene rubber (recycled tire material used for athletic field infill material)

SVOC - Semi-volatile organic compounds (compounds that vaporize at high temperatures)

PAH - Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (natural chemicals that occur primarily in coal, oil and gas)

PFAS - Per and Polyfluoroalkyl (human made chemicals that are commonly used in production of plastic products)

MRRP – Material Reduction and Recovery Plan