

May 16, 2023

To: Malden's Board of Health, RE Correspondence on the Roosevelt Park project submitted to Health Department office at 215 Pleasant St room 310 by email to boh@cityofmalden.org

I oppose artificial turf for the Roosevelt Park project at the Salemwood K-8 school. I hope you do too. Our local BOH is required by state law to "protect the public health and environment from damage and pollution." [1] The risks are real. Please unanimously oppose the use of artificial turf for this project.

Other communities are figuring this out. The Amherst Board of Health unanimously voted against using artificial turf. Malden's BOH needs to be a leader in this public health arena, not a laggard.

As you may know, it is difficult if not impossible to test for environmental contaminants. Artificial turf makes this more costly and complex. Many new health risk assessments and advisories (from state governments, the EPA, and various scientific watchdogs) have been released since the original conceptualization of the Roosevelt Park Improvement Project. [2] We need a 2023 fresh look at this.

Materials used in artificial turf fields are synthetic and comprised of a wide range of "forever" chemicals. These compounds are poorly understood. For many proprietary formulations, tests don't even exist. These chemical contaminants pose known and unknown health risks to Malden's residents.

As you know, "children are generally more sensitive to environmental contaminants than healthy adults". [3] Malden's children - especially those children with daily exposure at the Salemwood School - are unable to knowingly consent to accepting exposure to these health risks. Do you consent for them?

In 1954 a British Medical Journal linked smoking and lung cancer. It took 12 more years before "Caution - cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health" appeared on cigarette packs. Years later, cigarette producers still ran their ad campaigns. [4] How many people died by delay?

WGBH made the risks easy for all of us to see. Our neighbor in Boston is leading the way:

"The debate over the installation of new turf in parks in Boston comes just months after the Environmental Protection Agency released a series of health advisories over perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances in drinking water.

"That's the first time that EPA has said, 'OK, we were wrong, this stuff is really dangerous,'" said Bennett.

The chemicals are used in a wide variety of products, including artificial turf. PFAS don't easily break down, and because of widespread use, the chemicals have been found in water supplies and soil. Exposure has been linked to a myriad of health risks ranging from developmental issues to certain kinds of cancer." [5]

The immediate health risk is to the thousand-strong student population at the Salemwood School. Let's think about them. First and foremost, you have a duty to protect their health and environment. Please vote unanimously to reject the use of artificial turf. Future generations will thank you.

Sincerely, Brian DeLacey, 1 Earl Street, Malden, MA 02148

[1] 12/8/22 - Amherst Board of Health votes against artificial turf at high school athletic complex
<https://www.masslive.com/news/2022/12/amherst-board-of-health-votes-against-artificial-turf-at-high-school-athletic-complex.html>

[2] 'Our community has been deceived': Turf wars mount over PFAS
<https://www.eenews.net/articles/our-community-has-been-deceived-turf-wars-mount-over-pfas/>

[3] Boxford posted a "Frequently Asked Questions" on "Artificial Turf Fields" which states that "children are generally more sensitive to environmental contaminants than healthy adults".
https://www.town.boxford.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhliif321/f/uploads/turf_info_-_mass_dept_public_health_faq.pdf

[4] American Lung Association - Tobacco Control Milestones
<https://www.lung.org/research/sotc/tobacco-timeline>

[5] Boston has blocked new artificial turf fields in Boston Parks
<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2022/10/05/wu-blocks-new-artificial-turfs-in-boston-parks-refrain-from-calling-it-a-ban>

Other references

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4/20/23 - "Artificial Turf Legal Battle is Chapter in Ongoing Story"
<https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2023/04/20/artificial-turf-legal-battle-chapter-ongoing-story>

Mass.gov on "Artificial Turf Fields"
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/artificial-turf-fields>

5/10/22 - "Turf wars play out across Massachusetts"
<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2022/05/10/more-games-or-more-grass-fields-turf-wars-play-out-across-massachusetts>