

Dangerous Play: Studies find harmful ‘forever chemicals’ in artificial turf fields

[Beyond plastic](#)

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Right now in Philly it feels like you can’t open the newspaper or turn on the news without seeing the ongoing media coverage about PFAS chemicals being found in artificial turf fields across the city.

From the heartbreaking Philadelphia Inquirer reporting [linking PFAS-filled turf at Veterans Field and the incidence of rare cancers amongst former Phillies baseball players](#) to news stories showing that city agencies are allowing [PFAS-laden synthetic turf to be installed in Philly neighborhood parks](#), it’s clearer than ever that we need action to protect our communities and our children from these toxic “forever chemicals.” ...

PennEnvironment has long been working to address the threat PFAS poses to our health. We’ve generated thousands of public comments in support of stricter limits on PFAS in drinking water at both the [state](#) and federal level. We’ve testified at EPA hearings on the impact PFAS has had on Pennsylvania communities and our staff have lobbied Congress for more public funds to bring clean water to places like [Perkasie, Pennsylvania](#), where PFAS has contaminated well water for decades. PennEnvironment has also advocated for [bipartisan legislation](#) at the state level [to bring resources to Willow Grove](#), Pennsylvania, which has (sadly) emerged as a poster child nationally for PFAS contamination.

But of course if we’re going to truly halt the health and environmental threats posed by PFAS, we must do more than just keep cleaning up the mess – we must cut off the use of PFAS at the source, so we also are fighting to phase PFAS out of everyday consumer products, fire, fighting foam, and from synthetic turf.

One of the more recent places where PFAS has been found is in the artificial turf commonly used where kids and athletes—amateurs and professionals alike—go to play sports. Parents shouldn’t need to worry about the fields where their kids play their Saturday soccer games or the schoolyards where they have recess. But there’s now a growing awareness that the artificial turf that’s commonly found from major league stadiums to the high school football fields that teenagers play upon contains PFAS.

While companies rarely disclose the proprietary blend of chemicals in their plastic turf, [time and again](#) independent testing has found a variety of PFAS chemicals that can threaten human health. The Children’s Environmental Health Center at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York has [strongly discouraged](#) the installation of artificial turf fields because of the cancer risks to children and adolescent health, and parents are [sounding the alarm](#) about their own children’s illnesses.

But change is slow to come. Just last year, the City of Philadelphia installed a \$7.5 million field at Murphy Recreation Center in South Philadelphia that was supposedly free of PFAS. [Now, we're learning](#) that tests run on the turf used and the testing used to attempt to detect PFAS on this turf was incredibly flawed, leading to results that said the artificial turf was PFAS-free, when in fact it was not.

This all while Philadelphians – and the nation – are now grappling with the toxic threat of PFAS-laden turf. Testing by the Philadelphia Inquirer found 16 types of PFAS in the artificial turf used at Veterans Field between 1977 and 1981, including perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), two of the most well-studied and perilous of the thousands of PFAS being used.

Toxicologists familiar with PFAS noted, “the Vet turf findings were [concerning and problematic](#),” With [six former Phillies dead from a rare brain cancer](#), that statement may not be strong enough.