

Artificial Turf and Grass Fields FAQs

This information is as of March 2026.

1. How many athletic fields are in the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) portfolios?

The District maintains and operates 82 natural grass fields, 74 artificial turf fields, and 8 artificial turf play areas in the DPR and DCPS portfolios.

2. What type of infill is used in DGS artificial turf fields?

DGS uses virgin synthetic or natural alternatives for infill of artificial turf fields.

3. Why do we sometimes use artificial turf instead of natural grass?

Artificial turf is used because it provides a more durable and consistent playing surface that can handle heavy use without the need for long rest periods. Unlike natural grass, it is less affected by weather conditions, drought, and damage from animals or pests. Turf also reduces maintenance needs such as mowing, irrigation, and pesticide use, making it a practical choice for high-demand fields.

4. How could PFAS from artificial turf affect humans?

Current research indicates that artificial turf fields present little to no significant health risk from PFAS exposure. PFAS (also known as “forever chemicals”) may be present in some components of artificial turf, including fibers, backing, and infill pellets. Direct contact with pellets on the skin is considered a very low exposure pathway because PFAS in solid particles does not easily absorb through intact skin.

Potential exposure through incidental ingestion or inhalation of particles is also considered limited under normal use conditions.

Direct, long-term exposure to high levels of PFAS can affect human health. Studies have associated elevated PFAS exposure with increased cholesterol levels, effects on the immune system, hormonal changes, and in some cases a higher risk of certain cancers.¹ However, these effects are generally linked to sustained exposure at higher concentrations, most commonly through contaminated drinking water.

¹ <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/about/health-effects.html>

5. How are artificial turf fields maintained?

At each session, a contractor performs the following surface cleaning at each field:

- Remove and dispose of all debris, foreign waste and contaminants (including trash, leaves, debris, gum and seeds/nuts);
- Remove and dispose of all organic waste and weeds;
- Spot disinfect surfaces exposed to organic or biological waste, as needed;
- Disinfect entire play surface once per quarter (the “Disinfecting”);
- Remove all metal objects with a magnetic device;
- Treat surface for weed and pest intrusion, as needed; and
- Perform all other surface cleaning-related work (i) recommended by the applicable Field Builder (including those set forth in any applicable Field Builder’s Maintenance Requirements), or (ii) required by the Maintenance Plan.

6. How often are we maintaining artificial turf fields?

Artificial turf fields are designed to be a lower-maintenance alternative to natural grass fields. Routine maintenance typically includes one to two scheduled grooming services annually, with additional repairs or spot treatments performed as needed to address wear, seam issues, or infill redistribution.

Maintenance schedules can vary depending on field usage and condition, but the intent is to preserve field performance, safety, and longevity while requiring less routine upkeep than natural grass surfaces.

7. How often are Artificial turf surfaces changed or resurfaced?

Artificial turf fields do not follow a fixed replacement schedule. Surfaces are evaluated periodically, and replacement or resurfacing occurs when the field can no longer be effectively maintained through repairs or when performance indicators such as GMAX scores approach unacceptable levels.

Replacement is also dependent on the availability of capital funding. In general, artificial turf fields are designed to last several years, and resurfacing decisions are made based on field condition, safety, performance, and available resources.

8. Are the artificial turf fields maintained by in-house staff or contractors?

A combination of contractors and in-house DGS staff maintain the artificial turf. DPR staff also do some field grooming and maintenance for their sites.

9. Is there a difference in how DCPS artificial turf fields are maintained versus DPR artificial turf fields?

No. Artificial turf fields at DCPS and DPR facilities are maintained using the same standards and practices. Maintenance schedules may occasionally be adjusted to accommodate programmatic needs or field usage, but the overall maintenance approach remains consistent across both agencies.

10. Where have artificial turf fields been installed recently?

Some previous installations include:

- Deanwood Field – 2024
- Jelleff Field – 2024
- Edgewood – 2019
- Ferebee Hope – 2022
- Hearst – 2021
- Ridge Road – 2015
- Randall – 2016.

11. What is the average installation cost for an artificial turf field?

The average cost for turf installation is approximately \$15 per square foot, though pricing may vary depending on site-specific conditions. These estimates reflect costs as of March 2026. When projecting future work, DGS typically applies an annual inflation/acceleration rate of 3.5%. Installation costs do not include potential below-grade soil remediation or grading that may be required based on site conditions.

12. What is the average maintenance cost for artificial turf vs natural grass fields?

The average maintenance cost for turf is \$23,805 and for natural grass fields is between \$80,000-\$90,000* Note these costs reflect estimates as of 2025-2026. DGS typically assumes an inflation/acceleration rate of 3.5% per year when projecting work in the future. Installation costs do not account for below-grade soil remediation and/or grading. Natural grass fields also require more down time to prevent damage after rain. Use can increase cost of maintenance and repairs on natural grass fields.

13. What is the length of useful life for artificial turf compared to natural grass fields?

Artificial turf typically lasts about 10 years. Natural grass fields generally last 2 to 3 years without seasonal closures during cooler months.

14. What is the recommended rest period after events?

Artificial turf requires very little rest between events, while natural grass fields need several days to recover before hosting another event.

15. What is the recommended rest period after rain?

Natural grass requires one to two days of rest after rain. There is no rest needed for artificial turf.

16. What happens in extreme weather conditions?

In extreme heat, artificial turf can get hotter than grass. DGS issues advisories on very hot days: [DGS Turf Graphic.pdf \(dc.gov\)](#). Turf drains well in heavy rain, while grass can become muddy and damaged. In snow and ice, turf can be cleared carefully, but grass goes dormant and may be harmed by salt or equipment.

17. What are the safety risks associated with artificial turf fields?

Artificial turf fields can create a “heat island” effect, where surface temperatures are much higher than ambient temperatures. However, DGS recently pivoted to using organic filling which provides cooler temperatures. Risk of injury on well-maintained field is no worse/better than on natural grass.

18. What are the safety risks associated with grass fields?

Natural grass fields must be well-maintained, properly irrigated, mowed, aerated, and cared for to minimize safety risks. The risk of injury on a well-maintained grass field is about the same as on artificial turf.

19. What is a GMAX test?

Impact testing, commonly referred to as GMAX testing, is the standard method developed for testing and determining the shock attenuation of artificial and natural turf athletic fields. Impact testing of synthetic turf is important as GMAX values correlate to the safety of the playing surface. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) International’s standard F1936-10, the most commonly used standard, establishes a GMAX value of 200 for the maximum allowable limit for safety. Any higher GMAX values indicate harder playing surfaces, leading to a higher probability of concussions and other injuries.

20. How will the District address out of compliance fields in regards to GMAX?

Fields that fail the GMAX test are closed immediately. The notification process then begins where stakeholders are given information concerning the closure and the anticipated date of completion of repairs. These repairs can be completed in as little as a few hours, to several days, depending upon the severity of repair and availability of materials. Once repairs have been made, the areas are re-tested. If a passing GMAX score is obtained, the field will immediately become available for use.

21. What general information does the GMAX report include?

The report provides general information on the location site name, address, date, time, weather, and average test score of all 10 test locations. The individual drops and average scores are used to inform maintenance activities. The report includes a test matrix that depicts the results of each of the three drops at each of the 10 locations, totaling 30 drops. It also records the depth of the field material at each test location. Any one drop that is recorded above ASTM standards will be highlighted, and the field is considered in need of maintenance. Finally, there are area images and descriptions of all field test locations.

22. How is the community involved in the material decision for each site?

During the planning of modernization projects, our client agency (DCPS or DPR) usually engages in community outreach sessions, at which point they will inform and solicit feedback from the residents of their intent.

23. Does the District currently have a moratorium on crumb tire rubber field materials?

Yes, while reports and studies have yet to provide conclusive evidence of harmful effects, the DC Council implemented a moratorium on the use of crumb tire rubber materials to eliminate concerns raised by residents. The District has not installed any artificial turf fields with crumb tire rubber since 2016. While the District maintains a number of crumb rubber athletic fields, the infill used for repairs or replacement fields does not use recycled tire crumb rubber. DGS has ceased use of this material upon the adoption of the moratorium.