



Artificial Athletic Turf Fields Frequently Asked Questions

How many artificial turf fields are in the District?

The District maintains and operates 52 artificial athletic turf fields with an infill material composed mostly of sand and crumb rubber. These include fields at DC Public School (DCPS) and Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) facilities. The fields vary in age from one year old to more than 15 years old. DGS is dedicated to ensuring the safety of all District residents and users of these fields. The operation and maintenance of these fields includes installation, testing, repair, and replacement, if necessary.

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

Yes, the District has not installed any artificial turf fields with crumb 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 tire rubber. While reports and studies failed to provide inconclusive evidence of harmful effects, the DC Council determined to implement a moratorium on crumb rubber to eliminate concern which was raised from this specific artificial field material. DGS has ceased use of this material upon the adoption of the moratorium.

What is a GMAX test?

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, 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 from users or players impacting with the surface.

How often are fields maintained and tested?

The 52 artificial fields in the District are maintained and tested by a third party vendor (FieldTurf). This vendor performs a GMAX test for each field once annually. This vendor also performs maintenance on the fields which includes but is not limited to; surface brushing, surface aerating, surface raking, surface sweeping, complete inspection (line markings, seams, and high-traffic areas) and infill top dressing. If a field tests higher than the 200 value standards, DGS will make necessary repairs or, if necessary, replace the field. Oftentimes, it is only small areas of the field that test higher and require targeted repairs as opposed to replacing the entire field.

How many fields were out of compliance with GMAX testing?

Results from field tests in March and April 2017 revealed that only one field, located at Janney Elementary School in northwest, tested higher than the acceptable standard. Since the warranty recently expired at this field site and concerned this was a first-time failed field, DGS determined it important to implement immediate proactive action. A third-party manufacturer retested and confirmed results on all fifty-two fields which resulted in 16 fields testing higher than the standard. Nine fields were recommended for repair; seven fields were recommended for replacement. Due to disparities in the two reports, DGS brought in a test-only manufacturer to retest the seven fields recommended for replacement. Of these, only three were recommended for replacement. DGS is moving forward with the replacement of the three fields and all the repairs for other fields noted in the reports.

How does a field not meet compliance with GMAX testing?

Each field receives monthly maintenance in accordance with the field manufacturer's recommendations but over the course of time a field surface gets harder and repairs and replacements are necessary. An out of compliance result is not activity specific, so limiting activities on the field is paramount for safety.

How will the District address out of compliance fields?

With repairs and replacement underway, DGS is now focused on developing new procedures and testing protocols for the District's fields. It has committed to comprising an interagency working group to include DGS, DCPS, DPR, the Office of the City Administrator (OCA), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), and the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE). A draft report and recommendations is scheduled for release in late February 2018 with a final report due by the end of March of the same year.

What is the replacement material of the field at Janney Elementary School?

The field is being replaced with another synthetic surface compliant with the District's moratorium on crumb rubber.

What is the replacement schedule for a field that requires replacement?

The Janney Elementary School field has been replaced and is scheduled to reopen on September 21 in coordination with DCPS. The fields at the Adams Elementary School and at the John Eaton Elementary school will be replaced and set for reopening during the second week of October. Generally a field replacement takes four to six weeks.

Did the testing include artificial playground surfaces?

Currently the District does not test any playground surfaces, only artificial athletic turf fields.

What is the District's policy on artificial athletic turf fields?

Currently the District does not have a policy on artificial athletic turf fields. The Department of General Services, DCPS, and DPR will meet with stakeholders this fall and winter, in conjunction with the creation of the interagency workgroup, to create formal policy to ensure safe field use. Whenever possible, field repairs and replacements will be scheduled for minimal impact on school and community activities. For more information, please contact the DGS Communications Department at dgsprojects@dc.gov