

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6235

AS OF JANUARY 28, 1994

Brief Description: Making owners and operators of sports fields liable for injuries on artificial turf.

SPONSORS: Senators Hargrove, Snyder, Pelz and Drew

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Don Sloma (786-7319)

Hearing Dates: January 28, 1994

BACKGROUND:

In 1964, Seattle's Memorial Stadium received among the first synthetic playing surfaces to be installed on a sports field in the U.S. Today, synthetic sports fields are in relatively wide use in professional, college and high school competition.

The fields are typically made of a nylon or polypropylene monofilament ribbon in a carpet backing. A shock pad of plastics or rubber is usually used under the artificial turf. When used in outdoor applications where cold or rain are prevalent, installations usually include heating, drainage or flooding capability. While the fields can be expensive to install, they are reported to be lower cost than installation and maintenance of comparably used grass fields.

There are various brands of synthetic playing surfaces available which provide different useful life and playing characteristics. The most widely used surfaces are AstroTurf and those produced by All-Pro Athletic Surfaces. Shock absorbency and other characteristics of the playing fields vary greatly with age, exposure to weather and use.

Many professional athletes and trainers believe that greater numbers of certain sports injuries occur on synthetic playing surfaces than on grass fields. Several researchers report higher incidence of bursitis and various lower extremity injuries on synthetic turf. At least one professional sports players association (the National Football League) is engaged in efforts to study and restrict the use of AstroTurf.

In 1988, the Union of European Football Associations banned the use of artificial turf.

SUMMARY:

It is unlawful to play a sanctioned sport that is traditionally played on grass at the high school, college, university, amateur or professional level on a surface other

than grass. Owners and operators of sports fields larger than 15,000 square feet are strictly liable for injuries that occur on fields that do not comply with the act.

"Sanctioned sport" is defined as a sport endorsed or regulated by a political entity, including schools, or institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, associations or corporations or by professional sports organizations.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested