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## Portsmouth to test for PFAS in new turf field. Is it dangerous? City says no. Others disagree.

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PORTSMOUTH — City Councilor Peter Whelan believes it’s “a problem” there are PFAS chemicals in the city’s new artificial turf playing field, even though the City Council voted that it must be PFAS free as a condition of its purchase.

“The City Council took a vote that the field would be PFAS free and for whatever reason, it’s not,” Whelan said Thursday. “I don’t know whether that’s because of the city’s consultants, a salesman or the manufacturer, but we were misled and there’s got to be consequences for that.”

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“What those consequences are, that’s up to the new council,” said Whelan, whose term as a councilor ends soon.

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The City Council earlier this week voted unanimously to approve a motion Whelan made to require City Manager Karen Conard to commission “independent third party testing for PFAS in the new artificial turf playing field.”

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Portsmouth's new field **opened this year**. It is a product of FieldTurf, which has fields installed at locations on the Seacoast, nationally and globally. Similar discussions about turf fields have occurred in some other communities around the country.

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PFAS are man-made chemicals used in products worldwide since the 1950s, including firefighting foam, non-stick cookware and water-repellent fabrics.

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PFAS are considered contaminants of concern by federal agencies when found in drinking water, as has happened in the past in a Portsmouth city well at Pease International Tradeport, where thousands of adults and children were exposed to it.

There is disagreement on whether the PFAS chemicals used in athletic fields pose a danger to the health of people playing on the fields.

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Whelan called the finding that PFAS was used in the field – which city staff and the manufacturer now acknowledge – “not Portsmouth’s finest hour.”

“Considering we’ve been at ground zero with PFAS in the situation at Pease and the Coakley Landfill, and we just completed a million dollar plus storm water mitigation project right next to the field ... in all ways it’s a disaster,” Whelan said.

In July 2018, the City Council voted unanimously to bond up to \$3.4 million for the new playing field project.

Whelan said the new council taking office in January, led by Mayor-elect Deaglan McEachern, “should keep all its legal options” open when it comes to deciding how to handle the matter.

“The options could be to tear up the field and put grass down or leave it the way it is,” Whelan said. “That’s why I voted for a regular grass field, we’ve had so many issues with PFAS in Portsmouth, why compound that with PFAS in our turf field?”

Turf fields have advantages in terms of being able to use them more often, Whelan acknowledged, “but at what cost?” I’ve seen beautiful grass fields in other communities, I think that’s going to be the wave of the future.”

## **Portsmouth leaders at first said there was no PFAS in the field**

In September, Deputy City Attorney Suzanne Woodland disputed a claim made by advocacy group Non Toxic Portsmouth that the field was contaminated with PFAS.

She called the new turf field located near Community Campus “PFAS free.”

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who is also the acting deputy city manager, acknowledged "it's[Subscribe](#)

clear to say city staff does not know whether the manufacturing process (for the city's field) used any PFAS chemicals."

In a memo she shared with the council on Monday, Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice stated PVDF-HFP, a polymeric PFAS, was used in the field.

"PVDFHFP is biocompatible, inert and insoluble. It is very commonly used in medical devices – stents, meshes, replacement joints, etc. It has many different uses including food packaging and water purification (used within the plastic in water filters," Rice said in the memo. "To the best of our experts' knowledge, there is no study or data that suggests PVDF-HFP is toxic."

### **Is it dangerous to play on fields?**

During Monday's meeting, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby asked if the PFAS in the field "is a threat" like PFAS in drinking water.

"The answer is no, this field is safe from our point of view, there's no toxicological study that suggests that the additive that the manufacturer has used presents any risk," Woodland replied.

Whelan said, "I'll wait to hear from the experts" before deciding whether the PFAS in the field is not dangerous, as city staff contend."

Diana Carpinone, a member of Non Toxic Portsmouth, disputes that PFAS in the new turf field is not toxic.

She shared a series of links with Woodland in an email message listing concerns people have raised about the PFAS chemicals in the field.

She also noted in the email that "the city should seriously consider that the guidance they are getting on these matters is



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