More Places to Play. Stronger Local Economies.

The Community and Economic Value of Recycled Rubber in American Recreation



The better play Initiative



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Executive Summary

Communities thrive when people of all ages and abilities have places to play, exercise, and come together. That means playgrounds where children can have fun together, tracks that serve students and residents throughout the day, and fields that can handle busy schedules and reopen quickly after rain. These spaces give people more opportunities to stay active and bring families into town for tournaments and events.



Recycled rubber helps communities build and maintain these facilities. Developed from end-of-life tires and other rubber products, it provides cushioning for playground surfaces, resilience in running tracks, durable material for paths, and infill for artificial turf fields. Its value comes from both the performance of these surfaces and the recreation they make possible.

That is the starting point for this report: **What does the use of recycled rubber in recreation mean for communities?**

It means more access to recreation, more opportunities to stay active, and facilities that can accommodate heavy use while requiring less maintenance. And increasingly, it means economic value.

Recreation facilities attract visitors, support local businesses, and help communities make better use of public dollars. A large sports complex can bring thousands of families to town for tournaments. A well-designed playground can serve children of differing abilities while reducing maintenance expenses. A durable walking path can remain in use for years with fewer repairs.

The connection is especially clear with playing fields. Recycled rubber has long been one of the most widely used infill materials in artificial turf fields because it performs well and is economical. These fields can accommodate intensive use and, with proper drainage, reopen quickly after rain. For communities, that means more practices, more games, longer seasons, and the ability to host larger tournaments.

The economic benefits can be significant. In Panama City Beach, Florida, for instance, a sports complex with crumb rubber infill on its artificial turf fields generated an estimated $56 million in direct economic impact in its opening year. In Overland Park, Kansas, a major soccer complex reported more than $40 million in tournament-related economic impact in 2023. Elsewhere, playground and path projects have saved communities tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in construction and maintenance costs.

These examples tell a larger story. Recycled rubber helps communities create and maintain places to play while supporting local economic activity. It also gives material recovered from end-of-life tires a productive second life.

This report examines those benefits, drawing on economic studies, community projects, and public research to show how recycled rubber contributes to stronger, more active communities.

More Places to Play, More Opportunities to Participate

The value of recreation starts with access.

A community needs enough fields to accommodate its teams. It needs playgrounds that welcome children of different abilities. It needs tracks, trails, and other facilities that people can use regularly.

Recycled rubber helps meet those needs.

On playgrounds, surfaces using recycled rubber provide cushioning and make it easier for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices to move around. Running tracks use recycled rubber for resilience and durability. Paths incorporating recycled rubber can reduce erosion and recurring maintenance.

On artificial turf fields, crumb rubber infill helps provide cushioning, traction, and stability. The broader field system can accommodate far more continuous use than many natural grass fields and can often return to play shortly after rain. Schools, youth leagues, and tournament organizers value that reliability.

These benefits have an immediate value to families and athletes. But they also have a positive economic development impact as well.

When a facility can accommodate more activity, communities can serve more residents. When it can host tournaments, visiting teams and families spend money at local hotels, restaurants, and businesses. And when materials last longer or require less maintenance, public dollars go further.

Playing Fields: An Engine for Local Economic Development

Sports tourism has become a significant source of economic activity for communities across America. Youth baseball, soccer, softball, lacrosse, and other tournaments bring thousands of families to destinations they might otherwise never visit.

Facilities with artificial turf are particularly well suited to this market. With multiple fields, dependable playing conditions, and the ability to accommodate games after rain, they can host busy tournament schedules while continuing to serve local teams.

Recycled rubber is an important part of that infrastructure. The following examples illustrate the scale of the opportunity.

Panama City Beach, Florida

Publix Sports Park opened in 2019 with nine artificial turf fields and four natural grass fields. Its artificial turf fields were built using a system incorporating crumb rubber infill made from recycled rubber.

The park was designed to attract sports tourism beyond the area's traditional summer vacation season. In its opening year, it welcomed more than 80,000 visitors, generated approximately 120,000 hotel room nights, and produced an estimated **$56 million in direct economic impact**.

By fiscal year 2025, the complex was hosting more than 60 events annually. Its operator estimates more than **$115 million in total economic impact**, demonstrating how a major recreation investment can become a lasting driver of tourism.[1]



Overland Park, Kansas

The 12-field SCHEELS Overland Park Soccer Complex hosts local leagues and major regional tournaments. Recycled rubber infill use is historically documented at the complex, including a 2012 purchase from Entech. The fields have since undergone replacement, so those records do not establish the infill used today.



In 2023, tournaments at the complex generated an estimated **$40.5 million in economic impact and 24,116 hotel room nights**.

The following year, the complex co-hosted the U.S. Youth Soccer Midwest Regional Championships. That single event brought thousands of athletes and visitors to the Kansas City region, producing an estimated $7 million in metropolitan-area economic activity.

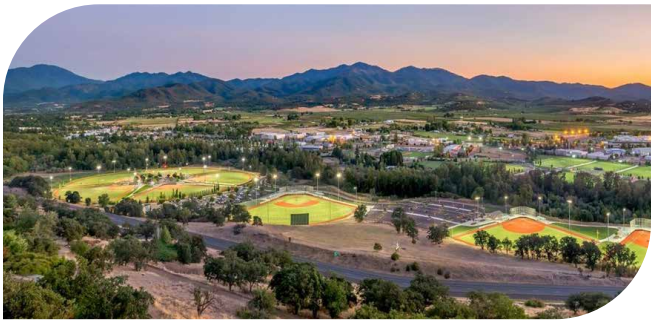
The facility illustrates how recreational infrastructure can serve local players while attracting substantial visitors from around the nation.[2]

Medford, Oregon

Lithia & Driveway Fields is a 132-acre sports complex with 15 artificial turf fields serving baseball, softball, soccer, and football.

In 2025, the facility hosted 1,790 teams and welcomed more than 238,000 visitors, generating an estimated **$13.37 million in economic impact**. Since opening in 2008, the complex has reportedly produced approximately $185 million in cumulative economic activity.

A single Memorial Day youth soccer tournament brought more than 200 teams to Medford and generated approximately $1.1 million over three days.[3]



Howard, Wisconsin

Not every community needs a large sports campus to see meaningful benefits.



At Nouryon Sports Complex, Wisconsin United FC converted two natural grass fields to artificial turf after repeated wet-weather cancellations. The improvements were expected to extend the playing season by six to eight weeks.
Club officials projected that the additional playing time and tournament activity could eventually generate **$2.3 million in annual economic impact** and more than 1,300 additional hotel stays.

The installation uses a sand-and-rubber infill mix. The economic projections show what additional playing capacity could mean for a smaller community.[4]

The Broader Picture

Other communities have reported similar benefits. In Branson, Missouri, the conversion of four baseball and softball fields to artificial turf coincided with a jump in tournaments from 13 in 2023 to a projected 28 for 2024. The 2023 tournaments alone had generated an estimated $18.4 million in economic impact, before the conversion.[5]

In Chesterfield County, Virginia, River City Sportsplex generated approximately **$36 million in local economic impact in fiscal year 2023**, while accommodating extensive use by local organizations. Recycled rubber infill use is historically documented at the complex. Subsequent field replacements and expansion mean that earlier documentation should not be read as a description of current infill across the facility.[6]

Economic Value Beyond Playing Fields

Recycled rubber's economic benefits extend well beyond artificial turf fields. Running tracks, playgrounds, paths, and parks can also attract visitors, reduce costs, and support local activity.

Running tracks. In Louisville, Kentucky, the Norton Healthcare Sports & Learning Center hosted 27 indoor track meets during the 2022–2023 season, drawing more than 32,000 athletes and generating a reported **$9 million in economic impact**. Its running track incorporates recycled rubber content.[7]

Playground renovations. In Hoffman Estates, Illinois, the park district retained a recycled rubber base when renovating Victoria Park's playground. The material had already been in service for 15 years. Keeping it in place saved an estimated **25,000 in disposal costs**, while reuse of other materials brought total renovation savings to approximately $35,000. The updated playground also improved wheelchair access.[8]

School playgrounds. Glen Paul School in Eureka, California, replaced wood chips with recycled rubber tiles made using material from approximately 6,350 end-of-life tires. Before the conversion, the school spent $2,000 every two years replenishing wood chips and another $10,000 every eight to ten years replacing them. The new surface reduced the need for those recurring expenses and allowed individual tiles to be replaced when necessary.[9]

Walking paths. In Austin, Texas, a shared-use path incorporating recycled rubber allowed the city to preserve mature trees without building expensive retaining walls. City staff reported more than **$400,000 in construction savings** in February 2026.[10]

At Belle Meade Country Club in Nashville, a recycled rubber paving product replaced a mulch path repeatedly damaged by storms. More than five years later, the former superintendent reported that the path remained in good condition and had saved thousands of dollars in maintenance labor.[11]

Together, these projects show how recycled rubber can provide value at different scales. Large facilities generate economic activity through tournaments and visitors. Smaller projects can save money, improve accessibility, and extend the useful life of community infrastructure.

Supporting the Circular Economy

There is another benefit: recycled rubber gives end-of-life tires a valuable second life. It's a win-win, providing recreational opportunities for Americans and also recycling material that would otherwise end up in landfill or on the side of the road.

The United States generated an estimated **264 million end-of-life tires in 2023**, according to the U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association. Finding productive uses for that material is essential to a functioning tire-recycling economy.

Recreation plays a major role. In 2023, sports surfaces accounted for 26 percent of the U.S. ground-rubber market, while playground loose mulch represented another 29 percent. Other recycled rubber products are used in flooring, molded surfaces, and paving.[12]

That demand helps sustain the recycling industry while allowing communities to benefit from the material's useful properties.

The circular-economy benefit is especially clear when products remain in service for many years. Victoria Park's ability to reuse its existing recycled rubber base demonstrates how recycled materials can continue delivering value long after their initial installation.

Health and Safety: What the Research Shows

Communities also need confidence in the materials they use.

In March 2026, California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment released the final results of a comprehensive study of crumb rubber infill used in artificial turf fields.

The study examined 35 fields across California and evaluated exposure to more than 100 chemicals through skin contact, inhalation, and incidental ingestion. Researchers also collected information from more than 1,000 soccer players to better understand how people use the fields.

The agency concluded that exposure to chemicals in crumb rubber infill did not pose significant health risks to the players, coaches, referees, and spectators evaluated, based on the study's methods and available data.

The findings provide important reassurance about the material. They do not address every aspect of field safety, including heat or injuries, which require their own management and precautions.[13]



Conclusion: Investing in Communities

The value of recreation is measured by what it makes possible.

A playground where more children can participate. A field that stays open after rain. A running track that brings athletes to town. A walking path that requires less maintenance. These are investments in community life, and they can deliver meaningful economic returns.

Recycled rubber has an important role in making them possible.

Across America, communities are using recreational infrastructure to expand access, attract visitors, support local businesses, and make better use of public dollars. Recycled rubber contributes to those outcomes while giving material recovered from end-of-life tires a productive second life.

The case for recycled rubber is ultimately a case for what communities gain: more places to play, more opportunities to participate, and stronger local economies.

References and Endnotes

[1] **Panama City Beach**. Visit Panama City Beach, "The Panama City Beach Sports Complex Played a Vital Role in Destination's Covid-19 Recovery": 80,000 visitors, 120,000 room nights, and $56 million in direct impact in less than a year after opening. Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, Budget and Program of Work Presentation, FY2025 review: more than 60 events and $115 million in total economic impact.

[2] **Overland Park.** City of Overland Park, 2023 SCHEELS Overland Park Soccer Complex Annual Report, June 5, 2024: 24,116 room nights and $40,475,528 in tournament economic impact. Visit Overland Park, 2024 USYS Midwest Regional Championship Economic Impact: $7 million across the metro area for an event co-hosted with Garmin Olathe Soccer Complex. City Council minutes, October 15, 2012, p. 21, document the historical Entech rubber-infill purchase.

[3] **Medford.** City of Medford, Lithia & Driveway Fields 2025 Annual Report, pp. 2, 6–7: 1,790 teams, 238,462 visitors, $13,366,138 in estimated annual economic impact, more than $185 million cumulatively, and the Memorial Day soccer tournament figures. The annual impact estimate applies a 1.85 multiplier to spending by local and visiting tournament participants; it is not direct visitor spending alone. The report identifies FieldTurf surfaces but does not specify crumb rubber infill.

[4] **Howard.** WBAY, "Village of Howard celebrates upgrades to Nouryon Sports Complex", October 23, 2025: Wisconsin United FC's projections of $2.3 million in annual impact and more than 1,300 additional hotel stays. Brock USA, Village of Howard – Nouryon Sports Complex, documents sand/rubber infill installed in 2025. The economic figures are projections, not measured annual results.

[5] **Branson.** City of Branson, "Turf Improvements at Baseball Complex Attract Top Tournaments", December 19, 2023: 13 tournaments and $18.4 million in estimated economic impact in 2023, with 28 tournaments projected for 2024.

[6] **River City.** Chesterfield County, "Diamonds In The Rough: Chesterfield Plans To Create Destination Softball Complex at Daniel Park": $36 million in local economic impact from River City events in FY2023 and more than 4,000 rentals by over 100 local organizations. Sprinturf's August 2019 project announcement documents field replacement; the county's facility listing identifies the expanded 16-field complex.

[7] **Louisville.** Norton Healthcare Sports & Learning Center, "Indoor Track Season Concludes Leaving a Major Impact on the Local Community", April 2023: 27 indoor meets, more than 32,000 athletes, and more than $9 million in economic impact during the December 2022–March 2023 season.

[8] **Victoria Park.** Hoffman Estates Park District, "Playground More than Meets the Eye", published in the Daily Herald, June 20, 2016: 25,000 in disposal savings from retaining the recycled rubber base and approximately $35,000 in total savings from reusing materials.

[9] **Glen Paul School.** Tire-derived products presentation hosted by Alameda County, Glen Paul School case study: recycled rubber tiles installed in 2011, approximately 6,350 tires used, and prior wood-chip replenishment and replacement costs.

[10] **Austin.** City of Austin, Mobility Committee meeting, February 12, 2026, staff presentation on trail construction and new materials: staff identified Flexi-Pave on the Caesar Chavez shared-use path extension and reported savings of more than $400,000 from avoiding large retaining walls and work around heritage trees.

[11] **Belle Meade.** Golfdom, "3 super solutions for common golf course issues", March 2025: former superintendent Kirk Gates's account of the Porous Pave path remaining in good condition after more than five years and his estimate of thousands of dollars in labor savings.

[12] **Tire recycling.** U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association, 2023 End-of-Life Tire Management Report, published October 2024: end-of-life tire generation and ground-rubber markets.

[13] **Health research.** California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, Release of the Final Report on Synthetic Turf, March 5, 2026, and the linked final study report. The findings concern chemical exposure from crumb rubber infill under the study's methods and scope.

Methodology

This report reviews published economic studies, government and facility reports, product documentation, and community case studies. It is a research review rather than a statistical meta-analysis.

Economic figures reflect reported facility-wide activity, visitor spending, operating savings, or projections, as identified in the text. They should not be interpreted as the economic contribution of recycled rubber alone.

Where available, material specifications were reviewed to establish whether a facility used recycled rubber. Some examples have documented recycled rubber installations; others illustrate the broader economic value of recreational infrastructure where the specific infill remains unconfirmed. Historical installations are not assumed to reflect current materials.

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