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News Releases

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EPA PUNTS ON RISKS TO CHILDREN FROM PLAYGROUND TIRE CRUMB — Agency Admits It Did Not Perform Promised Scientific Studies of Health Dangers

Washington, DC — Contrary to its public statements, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is not conducting studies on potential health effects to children from contact with shredded tires on playgrounds, according to correspondence released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). Despite serious concerns raised by its own scientists about health risks to children, the agency continues to endorse use of ground rubber (called “tire crumb”), on playgrounds without examining the extent of childhood exposure from ingestion or inhalation of toxic chemicals found within tires.

Every year millions of pounds of tires are recycled into and placed on playgrounds to reduce injuries from falls. In fact, tire crumb was added to the White House playground constructed for the Obama children.

Records obtained earlier this year by PEER under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) document EPA scientists strongly urging the agency to immediately “assess toxicological risks of tire crumb in situations where children are exposed.” On May 29, 2009, PEER wrote EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson asking her to 1) revoke her agency’s endorsement of tire crumb until research shows it is safe for children; 2) issue an interim public health advisory; and 3) coordinate with other agencies in a risk assessment.

In a reply to PEER dated July 8th, Peter Grevatt, an EPA Senior Advisor on Children’s Health wrote:

“One of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson’s top priorities is protection of children from harmful environmental exposures....In response to possible concerns raised by one of our regional offices, EPA initiated a limited field study to assess the potential for exposure to constituents of potential health concern in playgrounds and synthetic turf athletic fields constructed with tire crumb. We hope to release the study results later this summer....”

A week earlier, EPA spokesman Dale Kemery previewed study results in the June 30th edition of the Philadelphia Inquirer indicating that “the raw data shows there is no inhalation danger to children who play on various types of artificial fields and play surfaces.”

In July, PEER submitted another FOIA request for a copy of that study and any other “scientific assessments, studies or field monitoring by EPA personnel or contractors concerning possible health effects from use of recycled tire crumbs in playgrounds.” In a final answer to that FOIA dated September 11, 2009, Eric Wachter, director of the EPA Office of the Executive Secretariat conceded:

“The Agency has not conducted research to evaluate children's ‘health effects’ from tire crumb constituents.”

Wachter wrote that EPA only did a “literature review” in 2008 and after that began a “very limited methods evaluation study” of “available monitoring methods for characterizing environmental contaminant concentrations at those recreational fields” but has not yet finished even that.

“The polite way to say it is EPA misled parents and the public into believing it was actually addressing potential toxic exposure risks to kids,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. “Incredibly, EPA takes the position it does not know enough to withdraw its endorsement of playground tire crumb. Common sense and a precautionary approach to children’s health dictate that EPA should not endorse something that it has not examined.”

EPA is slated to receive a 40% budget increase, the biggest in its history, boosting FY 2010 taxpayer support to above \$10 billion a year.

“If safeguarding children’s health is a top priority at EPA, why can’t this multi-billion dollar agency afford to take a hard look at what is in our playgrounds, schoolyards and athletic fields?” asked Ruch. “At a minimum, EPA should pull its endorsement tomorrow and issue a health advisory until it has answers.”

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[Look at EPA scientists’ concerns about tire crumb risk](#)

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