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Nov 6, 2009 12:08 am US/Pacific

State Artificial Turf Study May Be Flawed

Ongoing Coverage: Turf Wars



Reporting Jeffrey Schaub E-mail

SAN FRANCISCO (CBS 5) — A state study of artificial turf athletic fields may be flawed, CBS 5 has learned.

The study by the Department of Health Hazard Assessment, due to be released next summer, will not include tests during hot weather, exactly when the state would prefer the tests be conducted.

At issue is whether ground-up material made from recycled tires can release toxins or toxic gases into the air, harming children and adults.

The "crumbs" contain several chemicals that are on California's Proposition 65 list of known carcinogens. Tests on the rubber have been made by other states and in Europe, but results have been inconclusive.

In a Green Beat investigational report, the state's lead scientist blamed the state's budget crisis. Dr. Charles Vidair told CBS 5 that his department couldn't hire contractors in time to conduct airborne tests during the hot summer months. Yet Vidair admitted that the results would be limited.

"Of course, unless we measure under these different temperatures, we will never know the exact relationship between temperature and volatilization of chemicals," he said.

State Senator Abel Maldonado (R) called the study "unacceptable." Maldonado authored the bill which called for the research study.

"We don't know what the impacts (of heat) are at that time and if the study isn't going to demonstrate that, then we have an incomplete study," Maldonado told CBS 5.

Artificial turf fields are very popular among school districts, communities, and universities. There are hundreds in California. But there are many unanswered questions about their possible health effects.

This year, California Attorney General Jerry Brown sued several turf manufacturers after high amounts of lead were found in the pigments used to give the artificial grass its green color. At least one manufacturer has agreed to stop selling material with lead in it.

There are also concerns about high heat. The fields act as a heat magnet and surface temperatures have been measured as high as 160 degrees fahrenheit. Also, critics worry that the surfaces can collect harmful bacteria because, unlike real grass, they are not watered or mowed.

But manufacturers are standing by their products. A spokesperson for Turf Field Corporation of Toronto, Canada said, "We absolutely stand behind the safety of our product."

Meanwhile, Senator Maldonado said as a result of the CBS 5 story, he is sending letters to the two state agencies in charge of the health study.

"I want answers," he said.

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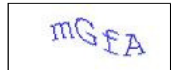
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