

Parents Say Schools' Tire-Crumb Turf Is Dangerous

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SAN DIEGO (CN) – Parents [sued](#) the San Diego Unified School District for installing artificial turf fields made with tire crumbs, claiming the crumbled rubber contains carcinogens that endanger children.



Keep Turf Safe sued the school district in Superior Court, claiming it violated the California Environmental Quality Act by failing to conduct environmental review or notify the public before installing artificial turf fields at elementary schools.

They ask the court to restrain installation of any crumb turf until the district complies with CEQA.

The parent group claims the school district “has not been forthcoming” about its decisionmaking process, and whether the decision was made on a case-by-case basis or is a large, possibly districtwide project.

Exhibits to the Feb. 1 lawsuit include a spreadsheet identifying 83 schools scheduled to get turf fields between 2014 and 2019. The list, released by the school district, does not identify which schools will use tire crumb turf.

Tire-crumb turf is made of recycled tires that are ground to a sand-like consistency. "The tire crumb poses a risk and contains heavy metals, known carcinogens and other toxic substances," the parents say in the complaint. "Despite this, respondent is happy to allow San Diego's young children to roll on these fields, eat and drink on these fields (risk ingestion), collect tire crumb pellets, and take home pieces of tire."

They add: "Evidence readily available illustrates an unusually high incidence of cancer among young soccer goalies across the United States who have played on tire crumb turf."

Los Angeles Unified School District and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation decided not to install tire-crumb turf fields due to health concerns, the group says.

They add that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission does not endorse tire-crumb turf as safe for children to play on, and say the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is studying the material and is expected to release a peer-reviewed report this summer.

They say the risks go beyond the schoolyard, as heavy rain can wash the tire crumbs into storm drains, and did so in January this year at Silver Gate Elementary School.

Neither Silver Gate nor Euclid Elementary School conducted environmental review or took public comment before installing the turf, the parents say.

"Recycled tire material gets dangerously hot and emits fumes," they say in the complaint. Euclid Elementary installed the turf in September 2016. "The first day that the artificial tire-crumb field was opened, 44 students were sent to the school nurse

for heat exhaustion after playing on the tire crumb field," according to the complaint.

Environmental impact reports for turf installations at two other elementary schools under review do not mention what materials will be used, another violation of CEQA, the parents say.

They say that no overall environmental review for the project to install turf fields at more than 80 schools has been issued, let alone on a school-by-school basis.

Erika Lundeen, a parent and teacher, at Euclid Elementary, helped parents Silver Gate Elementary petition the school principal to wait to install the crumb turf until more safety information is available. She helped gather 200 parent signatures, but said in an interview that their concerns were ignored when the school site council voted to install the turf.

Keep Turf Safe is represented by San Diego attorney Gabriela Torres with Resolve Legal Solutions. Torres said parents of elementary school children are particularly concerned because the children could be exposed to the tire crumbs throughout their 13 years at public schools.

"The district has a duty to disclose any hazardous material in schools that children will be exposed to, and in this instance, they failed to perform that duty," Torres said.

San Diego Unified spokeswoman Shari Winet said in an email that the fields are safe.

"Providing a well-balanced education with safe, top-quality facilities is the district's utmost priority," Winet wrote.

"Synthetic turf was chosen by the district because it met high standards for quality, safety, and durability. We believe the decision to install turf fields has enhanced the district's athletic programs and the overall experience for students at district schools."

The school district has a contract with FieldTurf, which is facing a federal [class action](#) from a New Jersey city and school district. The borough of Carteret sued FieldTurf in December last year, claiming the turf deteriorated much more quickly than the promised 10 years, and posed safety concerns. State lawmakers asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate.

In a statement, FieldTurf said it's already met with the FTC.

"FieldTurf is committed to honoring our warranties and working with our customers to address any issues if they arise," the company said. "We are confident that the facts, when considered in full, will show that our customers were well-served by FieldTurf. We have met with the FTC, at our request, and have been subsequently informed that the FTC will not be proceeding with an investigation."

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