

# Questions Niles Park District Science Justifying Crumb Rubber

*By Tom Wessell on March 07, 2018*

**(Ed. Note: The following is an open letter to the Niles Park District.)**

Dear Niles Park District,

On February 15, you held a special hearing to “share” information regarding the safety of the soccer field turf at the LoVerde Center in Niles. This special hearing came about because of a CBS 2 story that aired January 18, about a promise made by former park boss Joe LoVerde “not to use a rubber-based” turf infill. You decided however, to install ground-up tires or crumb rubber anyway putting children’s health at risk.

To justify your decision, you point to: 1) Over “90 peer reviewed studies” proving crumb rubber is safe, even though the vast majority of studies were funded by the tire recycling or turf industry. 2) Studies by Archie Bleyer and Michael K. Peterson, both “scientists for hire” for the Rubber Recycling Industry as well as testimony from Richard “Dick” Gust, a spokesperson for

the tire recycling industry. 3) Two hundred ninety-six fields in the Chicago area that use crumb rubber infill, even though some of the schools you listed actually do not use crumb rubber. 4) Studies by various state department of health organizations. 5) A static air quality test performed by industrial hygienist David Sloman.

There are other problems with this as well. It is not evident that you issued a proper request for proposals (RFP). It appears that Wight Engineering and Field Turf were “awarded” the project. If you had actually wanted to test the marketplace for ideas and options you could have issued the RFP so that other companies besides Field Turf could respond. New York City, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles Park District, Minneapolis, MN, Hartford, CT, Montgomery County, MD, Midland, TX, and a host of other communities used safer infill alternatives.

Whether it was to save money or something more nefarious, you failed to test the market place for better, safer infill alternatives.

According to the State of Washington Department of Public Health “synthetic turf fields made with crumb rubber infill do contain chemicals that have been shown to cause cancer.” It is clear you failed to consider the safety risks associated with crumb rubber. At the April 18th, 2017 board meeting, the only person to testify regarding the safety of crumb rubber was Jonathan Huard, a Field Turf representative. You simply ignored research by noted experts like Dr. Joel Forman and Dr. Philip Landrigan of Mt. Sinai Hospital or Dr. David Brown of

EHHI, or Dr. Stuart Shalat as well as many other scientists and researchers.

The EPA and CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) have retracted earlier statements that crumb rubber is safe for children to play on. This alone should have prevented you from using ground-up tires. Air filtration tests are limited at best in proving crumb rubber's safety for children. According to Dr. Stuart Shalat "these volatiles are going to be adsorbed onto the surface of the carbon particles in the turf crumbs. When these particles are inhaled, then exposure to the volatiles would occur in the lungs from the particles, not from the vapors present in the air." It is also important to keep in mind the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) Permissible Exposure Limits, which is the threshold David Sloman uses to determine chemical concentrations is more suited to adults working in industrial or high chemical environments than it is for small children.

There are safer turf infill alternatives besides crumb rubber. You claim because alternatives like cork have not been tested you are content sticking with crumb rubber even though crumb rubber contains hazardous chemicals. Clearly, you are basing your decision to stick with crumb rubber on research from the Synthetic Rubber Council and Synthetic Turf Council. Because there is no scientific consensus crumb rubber is safe for children, the Niles Park District should replace the crumb rubber infill with a less toxic infill immediately.

**Steve DeMotte**

**Niles**