



Response to “S.F. debating artificial turf on playgrounds”

As the leading manufacturer of synthetic turf product in the world with over 2,500 fields installed, we at FieldTurf Tarkett read with great interest your June 18 piece "S.F. turf battle: Synthetic Grass for Playgrounds?"

While struck by how quickly our industry has gone from cost-efficient enablers of exercise and sport to being compared here to tobacco industry titans, we can appreciate the emotion and high stakes around the subject of lead and the health of our children. To that end, we highlight our industry's openness and commitment to getting all the answers around synthetic turf, lead and potential health risks, and an underappreciated growing body of existing science that suggests artificial turf poses no health risk to children.

- In the last decade FieldTurf has installed 2,500 polyethylene turf fiber fields. Not one health related illness has been reported and no field has ever been closed. We are similarly not aware of any issues relative to our residential installs.
- And while press reports would lead you to believe there has been little study of synthetic turf technology, on the contrary there have been hundreds of studies conducted by national, state and local governments, school systems and healthcare and environmental groups. The overwhelming majority of these studies conclude that synthetic turf is safe for our kids and our environment.

Also supporting the above are studies conducted in countries outside the U.S that too found no clear health risk from synthetic fields.

Just recently the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission spokesman Scott Wolfson said “there is no indication that exposure to the turf could pose any harm.”

Hundreds of studies have been completed to discover the truth about any potential risks of artificial turf, specifically the rubber crumb rubber. Government health ministries and environmental bodies around the world have commissioned extensive research.

So have world health organizations, leading universities and independent scientific committees. Elected officials have reacted to the concerns of their constituents by commissioning studies to get the facts.

Read what the experts have to say in independent testing, studies and reports on the potential health and environmental impact of artificial turf.



For a listing of the hundreds of studies carried out and a collection of the actual research and the factual conclusions, please visit www.fieldturf.com/sbrfacts and download the documents at the end of the page. Some of the highlights include:

- Tests comparing samples of artificial turf infilled with rubber showed similar release rates to control samples without any infill material.
- Tests show no VOC in tire factories to be in excess of those found in the ambient air levels. There is clear scientific evidence that release of PAHs into the environment is negligible relative to other sources such as cooking, power generation, wood stoves or vehicular traffic. Neighborhood Sunday BBQs release more volatile compounds into the atmosphere than the local artificial turf fields.
- In the event of ingestion of crumb particles, although highly improbable, the particles do not present any toxicity, as the digestive system is not powerful enough to extract the chemical components from the rubber.
- Tire waste has no toxic influence on fauna and micro-aquatic organisms. Inhaling is practically negligible because crumb rubber does not give off volatile products. Direct contact with the skin does not present any real danger, even from the point of view of allergy. Biological tests have shown the absence of genotoxicity.
- Moreover, artificial turf represents .0000075 of the rubber worn off tires on our roads. If this is a concern, why are we not doing anything about the 99.9999925 part of the problem?

The results of a long-term study confirms that the rubber granules used in the construction of artificial turf fields pose absolutely no threat to the environment.

ALIAPUR, the leading French government body responsible for used tires, along with ADEME, the French Agency for Environment and Energy Management has completed a scientific study that aimed at evaluating possible environmental impact from the rubber granules in sports fields that are derived from recycled used car tires.

The studies prove no cause for concern to human health. The results indicate the following:

1. A comparable behavior regardless which type of infill material was used - whether SBR from used tires, new TPE thermoplastic material or EPDM new virgin rubber material.
2. The absence of impact of these materials on water resources.
3. There was no effect on health associated with the inhalation of VOC and aldehydes emitted by artificial surfaces.
4. Emissions from the artificial turf without any infill material are very low compared with those from other construction products (ex: parquet flooring).
5. From an ecotoxicological point of view and on the basis of a comparison with strict European health standards, the water that passed through the artificial grass

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sample fields was proven to have no impact on the environment, regardless of the type of infill in the turf.

Also worth pointing out is an error in the story that notes New York state legislators put a moratorium on synthetic fields until investigations are completed. In fact, the moratorium was proposed but voted down largely on the back of existing science/testing that concluded there is no clear health risk.

The article frames the question of how municipalities need balance such considerations as water and energy use, maintenance costs and environmental health -- kind of shaping the debate as a trade-off type consideration. We think this is an interesting premise and agree that municipalities have far more to think about these days with all their varied decisions, but believe FieldTurf product offers the best of both worlds -- measurable cost savings, better player conditions and a product safe for both our children and environment.

FieldTurf has made a commitment towards having a positive impact on the environment. To this end, FieldTurf looks for innovative ways to reduce waste, reuse resources and recycle products. FieldTurf uses a clean, washed silica sand and “cryogenic” rubber, the only rubber used in a FieldTurf field. Its extensive recycling process eliminates all metallic and polyester residues. This process ensures that toxins are not leaked into the environment. Rigorous standards are in place within the recycling industry.

The installation of a FieldTurf field eliminates the use of harmful pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides, while at the same time, removes over 20,000 tires from landfill sites. FieldTurf requires no mowing, fertilizing, reseeding or watering. A typical soccer / football field can use between 2.5 million and 3.5 million gallons of water per year. Coupled with reduced labor costs related to maintenance, equipment and elimination of costs for supplies such as fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, many of our clients report a reduction in maintenance costs of as much as \$30,000 to \$60,000 per field, per year.

Additionally, Governor Schwarzenegger recently signed assembly Bills 338 and 369 into law. These bills require the State Department of Transportation to use the exact same SBR rubber in set percentages on all of its asphalt paving as long as it meets ASTM D8. The second bill awards grants to the California Waste Management Board to award grants to schools, cities, counties and districts for the funding of public works projects that use SBR rubber. How could the State of California do this if they deemed SBR rubber to be unsafe in any way? The state of California encourages, funds and gives grants towards end users of fields and tracks who use recycled tires, thereby removing them from landfills.



Letter from “Association of Sports Field Users”

From: Doug Fielding [<mailto:doug.fielding@companion-group.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, June 18, 2008 2:32 PM
To: jberton@sfchronicle.com
Subject: In A Perfect World- Artificial and Grass Fields

I read your article on synthetic turf. Our non-profit, Association of Sports Field Users (ASFU) is the operator and principle force behind the development of the new regional playing fields in Berkeley. We represent the interests of about 17,000 Bay Area athletes. We also maintain about a dozen grass fields for various governmental jurisdictions

Synthetic fields, which we support, do not represent a demonizing of grass fields. Rather they represent the only solution to the overwhelming demand for outdoor recreation. This demand has been fueled by encouraging girls and women (who now account for about 40% of all soccer players) to take up athletics, a push for all children to get more exercise to help address the obesity crisis, and the never ending drumbeat for adults to get more exercise for long term health benefits.

The fact that virtually every available hour, weekdays, weekends and nights for September through February 2009 at the new five field complex was booked within fifteen minutes speaks to the overwhelming demand for outdoor recreation spaces.

It is simply not physically possible; price no object, to maintain safe grass fields in the face of this overwhelming demand. If you walk the existing fields in San Francisco and many other urban areas, you will find fields denuded of grass with ankle breaking holes, level changes, and protruding sprinkler heads. In many cases this isn't due to poor maintenance, rather its a result of unrelenting traffic on the grass which isn't much different than the grass on your front lawn.

So your options are as follows:

1. Continue to allow people to play on unsafe grass fields which will regularly result in ankle and knee injuries.
2. Close the grass fields for periodic maintenance, thus significantly reducing the number of available hours for outdoor sports and exercise.
3. Install synthetic fields to handle the demand.

One option not listed is building new grass fields because there is virtually zero physical space that is suitable or affordable to build any kind of field, synthetic or not, unless you

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start converting open spaces or golf courses to places for active recreation. The new regional field complex cost about \$20 million and took advantage of underutilized land.

The downside to synthetics are that they can become astonishingly hot in places like Danville and Modesto and there are some studies which suggest they can off gas toxic materials when heated. The lead issue, was found on two fields made by the same manufacturer and the same study found that fields made by other synthetic field manufacturers did not have this problem.

It is one thing to acknowledge that under certain circumstances these fields may off gas and quite another to conclude that these vapors will have a negative health impact on people who are running up and down the field for a few hours a week. Do the vapors actually rise the four, five or six feet so that they can be ingested? Should this be the case, how much are these vapors diluted by the breezes, player movement and the significantly larger air volume above the surface of the field? And does the standard for exposure, often 24/7, still apply when the exposure is only six hours a week? And what is the trade off between eliminating exposure and eliminating exercise?

Certainly the above issues should be studied but it's quite a bit premature to compare providers of synthetic fields to tobacco companies who knowingly hid and denied the connection between smoking and lung cancer. To this day I don't see the benefit of smoking- the same will never be said about exercise.

Doug Fielding
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