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Environmental ALERT

Potential Hazard Associated with Lead in Synthetic Turf Fields

On April 14, 2008 the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) issued a press release related to a potential lead hazard posed by synthetic turf used on athletic fields.

As part of an on-going investigation by NJDHSS at a contaminated scrap metal yard in Newark, NJ, children were observed playing in an adjacent athletic field and a decision was made to conduct sampling to determine if lead had migrated to the field. Laboratory analysis was conducted and results revealed high lead levels which were determined to be from the turf fibers on the field and not the scrap yard. This led the NJDHSS to conduct sampling on other synthetic turf fields. NJDHSS provided the federal Consumer Products Safety Commission the data and communicated their concern over the potential national impact of these results.

In March of 2008 NJDHSS obtained samples from 12 fields in Bergen, Hudson, Mercer and Morris Counties. The fields were of varied composition and contained nylon, polyethylene and a mix of both materials. Results showed that 2 of the 12 turf fields yielded lead concentrations greater than the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Agencies standard for residential cleanups, the Residential Direct Contact Soils Cleanup Criteria (RDCSCC) of 400 mg/kg in soil. It should be noted that there are no recognized guidelines or standards regarding lead levels in synthetic turf fields.

As indicated by the NJDHSS, the associated effects of exposure to lead contained in synthetic turf fibers are not known at this time and the involvement of the CPSC was requested to determine the need for further evaluation. Preliminary recommendation issued by NJDHSS include wetting fields with water before and after use, encouraging good hygiene after playing on the field and limiting access especially to children under 7 years of age as a precaution.

“We do not know the health impact, if any, that may result in people who use these fields,” said Dr. Bresnitz Deputy Commission, NJDHSS and State Epidemiologist. “One concern is that children who live in homes with lead-based paint or who have had exposures, any lead from turf would just add to the lead levels in their bodies.”

The NJDHSS is conducting further examination into the human impact of this issue and expects to have some additional information by early May.

Multiple municipal, K-12 and higher education clients of BSG-PMK Group have already requested testing of their synthetic turf fields. We posses the expertise to conduct on-site environmental sampling to evaluate the potential presence of lead in synthetic turf fields. We maintain an excellent rapport with NJDHSS and can provide sound and reasonable recommendations related the management and impact of this issue.

For further information, please contact Patrick Lorimer at plorimer@pmkgroup.com or 800-879-6681 x6529.

Corporate Office: 65 Jackson Drive • Cranford, NJ 07016 • Tel 908.497.8900 • Fax 908.497.9134 • Web www.birdsall.com

PMK GROUP
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