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DEP Says Study of Artificial Fields Now Set to Assess Health and Environmental Impact of Crumb Rubber

Study involves DEP, DPH, CAES and UCONN Health Center

The Connecticut Department of Environmental protection (DEP) says steps are now in place to conduct a study to determine if there are health and environmental impacts resulting from the use of crumb rubber for artificial turf playing fields.

The process for a scientific analysis of the impacts of crumb rubber is contained in an agreement recently reached between DEP, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) and the University of Connecticut Health Center. The study will be funded with $245,000 available to DEP for special projects from the settlement of cases involving violations of environmental regulations.

DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy said, "This study is being conducted to respond in a credible manner to concerns that many people have raised about the potential impact of the presence of crumb rubber on playing fields. Through this study, a team of scientists will gather accurate and reliable data that DPH will use to issue a full Health Risk Assessment. This report, expected to be available early next year, will provide valuable guidance to municipalities, school systems, educational institutions and others who operate or are considering installing artificial playing fields that make use of crumb rubber." The study will complement the work of other states in the region currently evaluating these materials.

The study will involve both tests and readings at actual fields and laboratory analysis. Under the agreement for the study, the agencies involved will conduct the following work:

CAES: Laboratory tests to determine the chemical makeup of crumb rubber used on playing fields and to determine what substances may volatilize or leach from crumb rubber.

UCONN Health Center: Collection of air samples at playing fields by industrial hygienists – under both stationary and playing conditions, and laboratory analysis of the samples. Samples will be taken during warm weather conditions – when there is the potential for maximum volatilization from crumb rubber - this summer.

DEP: Perform storm water sampling and data analysis to detect the presence of any metals or compounds in water that runs off of artificial turf fields containing crumb rubber. The agency will also produce an initial environmental risk assessment based on its sampling data.

DPH: Evaluate data presented in the reports from CAES, the Health Center and DEP and publish a final Health Risk Assessment by January 31, 2010. This assessment will enable parties to fully consider and weigh any risk factors when determining whether to install artificial turf field with crumb rubber.

Funding for the Study

Funding for the study was earmarked for this purpose under a settlement announced May 16, 2008 between the State of Connecticut and the developers of Montville Commons Shopping Center.

The settlement resolved violations of state environmental laws in 2005 concerning construction of an illegal dam and the management of storm water during construction of the shopping center.

Background on Artificial Playing Fields and Crumb Rubber

Installation of artificial turf fields has become a more common practice as cities and towns and educational institutions seek to reduce both maintenance needs created by the heavy use of grass fields and demands for water and pesticides needed for care of natural grass.

One popular design for these fields involves the use of crumb rubber infill, which provides, drainage, a layer of padding and holds the blades of synthetic grass upright.

The crumb rubber used in artificial turf fields is mainly composed of recycled tires, which contain man-made and natural rubber. Chemicals called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can be found in the crumb rubber. Crumb rubber can also contain heavy metals such as zinc and copper**.**