

November 29, 2015

Hello,

I am the parent who started the conversation about crumb rubber at Tam High this past summer, and lead the charge to use the CoolPlay non-toxic top coat. During that process I did research on crumb rubber and alternative infill materials, and here is a summary of my findings.

You can also find this letter at <http://backtalk.com/downloads/draketurf.html>.

-- Frank Leahy  
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### **Summary of findings:**

A. In June of 2015, [Yale University released a study](#) showing that new crumb rubber, as received from a variety of vendors, consists of at least 96 chemicals, only 48 of which have been studied by the EPA. And of those 48, 12 are known carcinogens, and 20 are known irritants. ([http://www.ehhi.org/turf/new\\_study\\_jun2015.shtml](http://www.ehhi.org/turf/new_study_jun2015.shtml))

B. There is a lot of literature on crumb rubber -- both pro and con. A good summary page can be found [here](#). (<http://www.synturf.org/crumbrubber.html>)

C. I have included an appendix at the bottom of this letter with a lot of good links, including several NBC News stories that you might find interesting to watch.

D. In June of 2009 [USA Today reported](#) that the LAUSD (LA Unified School District), the largest school district in California, as well as the NYC Dept of Parks and Recreation banned the use of crumb rubber in all new artificial fields. In other words, this issue has been on people's radar for at least 6 years. ([http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/2009-06-10-artificial-turf\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/2009-06-10-artificial-turf_N.htm))

"The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Los Angeles Unified School District have decided that any new artificial fields they purchase must use a different material as its base, or infill, layer. The moves will mean using costlier alternatives such as one that uses coated grains of sand.

"The health of our students is more important than any other issue," says LAUSD board member Marlene Canter, whose district includes Helen Bernstein High School in Hollywood where a coated sand called FlexSand was used in an artificial turf field that opened last fall. "You should never equate economics with health. In no way should we be skimping on something like this that could affect our kids."

E. In September of 2015, [NBC News reported](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-wont-say-if-artificial-turf-safe-kids-n435731) that the head of the Environmental Protection Agency would not answer a direct on-camera question about whether the surface found on playgrounds and athletic fields across the country is safe for kids to play on. (<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-wont-say-if-artificial-turf-safe-kids-n435731>)

"I have nothing to say about that right now," EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy told NBC's Stephanie Gosk when Gosk caught up with her in a Capitol Hill hallway. Prior to their encounter, NBC had already made repeated requests for interviews with the EPA without success.

F. I spoke with several infill vendors, and there are a wide variety of crumb rubber alternatives out there, including Zeolite, CoolPlay, TPE, GeoFill, Corkonut, and Nike Grind.

### **Arguments for and against:**

The arguments for keeping the crumb rubber status quo fall into three categories: a) the science isn't "settled", b) everyone else is doing it so it can't be that bad, and c) it costs too much.

**A) Settled science:** Lead paint. DDT. Thalidomide. Arsenic. Mercury. Dioxins. Soy infant formula. Bisphenol in bottles. Flame retardants in children's clothing that acts as endocrine disruptors. At one time or another people thought these were good ideas, and each had periods during which the science was not "settled". But now we know better. And I'm confident that it won't be long before crumb rubber joins that list.

**B) Everyone else is doing it:** We know from the Yale Study that crumb rubber contains at least 12 known carcinogens. We know other organizations have banned it. We know there are alternatives. We know the alternatives are not prohibitively costly. I believe we should follow LA Unified's lead and decide that "The health of our students is more important than any other issue", rather than falling back on "Everyone else is doing it".

**C) Cost:** We actually don't know what the true cost differential is. There was a cost surcharge of \$48,000 for the CoolPlay material on the Tam High turf field because we made the material switch so late in the process. But there may be field designs, and infill material alternatives, that have little or no cost differential. I also believe we can leverage economies of scale by working with local private schools (MA, Branson, SI, etc.), other districts, the county, and even the state, to come up with a design and non-toxic material choice that works as well, or better, than crumb rubber, and is the same price or cheaper.

### **Two proposals:**

Based on the above, I have proposed that the district take the following two actions:

1) Place a temporary moratorium on the use of crumb rubber as infill material for any new or replacement district field while a formal review is performed.

2) Appoint a task force to investigate alternative field designs and infill materials, and get them costed out so we know exactly what's possible and how much it will cost. This group would contact vendors, as well as reach

out to other schools and districts to discuss their plans for future artificial turf fields. This should take no more than 3-4 months.

## **Appendix:**

**Tam Turf fund-raising website:** <http://tamhighturf.strikingly.com/>

### **Videos:**

<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-wont-say-if-artificial-turf-safe-kids-n435731>

<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/high-school-changes-plans-artificial-turf-field-n232686>

### **Informative News Articles and Websites**

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/the-cancer-list-keeps-growing-among-athletes-on-synthetic-turf-300099336.html>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/artificial-turf-cancer-rubber-tires\\_n\\_5412140.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/artificial-turf-cancer-rubber-tires_n_5412140.html)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/early-lead/wp/2014/10/09/is-there-a-link-between-artificial-turf-and-cancer-in-soccer-goalie/>

<http://www.synturf.org/epa.html>

<http://necir.org/2015/05/10/toxic-turf/>

<http://www.ceh.org/get-involved/take-action/a-cocktail-of-harmful-chemicals-in-artificial-turf-infill/>

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/fields-649157-rubber-turf.html>

<http://www.thepostgame.com/blog/daily-take/201410/synthetic-turf-giving-athletes-cancer-soccer-crumb-rubber-goalie-fields>

<http://www.momsteam.com/health-safety/turf-wars-pros-and-cons-of-artificial-turf>