**Lead confirmed on Vancouver synthetic turf playing fields**

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Lab tests done over the past month confirm the presence of lead on synthetic turf playing fields at Trillium Park and VanTech Secondary School in Vancouver. Vancouver residents Kathy Lau and Peter Nicol collected crumb rubber pellets that appear to have been washed out of Trillium Park synthetic turf playing field perimeter and had them analyzed for lead at Total Safety/Maxxam Analytics Lab in Burnaby. The crumb rubber pellets tested positive for lead at 15.9 micrograms per gram. The lab report states that “When lead-containing coatings are disturbed… or otherwise abraded, lead dust, mist or fumes can be released into the… environment and be inhaled or ingested…”. The crumb rubber infill from VanTech, the oldest public synthetic turf playing field in Vancouver, was analyzed at Element Lab in Surrey, and measured 12 micrograms of lead, and the plastic turf blades measured even higher for lead at 24.3 micrograms per gram.

In a letter to the Vancouver Park Board this past April from Dr. Bruce Lanphear, a professor at SFU Health Sciences and clinician scientist at BC Children’s Hospital Research Institute, he urged the Park Board Commissioners to put a moratorium on artificial turf installation because “children are exposed to lead and other toxic chemicals in the rubber and plastic materials in artificial turf”. His research on the impacts of lead on children’s health led the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to declare, “There is no safe level of lead in children’s blood”. Lanphear states in his letter that despite 17% of the chemicals in crumb rubber classified as carcinogens by the US EPA, “there are no long-term studies to quantify the extent of children’s exposure to lead and other toxic chemicals found in synthetic turf playing fields.” The residents have learned that the California EPA is due to release this summer, results from a study of the chemicals in crumb rubber infill and the plastic turf and backing that will provide exposure information and a health impacts assessment.

Along with Nicol, another concerned City resident, Janet Brown, met with Park Board Commissioners John Irwin and Gwen Giesbrecht at Trillium Park recently, where the Commissioners seemed shocked to see the piles of crumb rubber pollution that had escaped beyond the fenced fields and appeared to have been washing into adjacent storm water drains. The residents’ hope is that Irwin and Giesbrecht will persuade the remaining 4 Commissioners to join them and Commissioner Dumont in rejecting further synthetic turf with toxic crumb rubber infill in Vancouver. Curiously, the Green Party Commissioners are divided on this issue.

Nicol and Brown invited all Park Board Commissioners and staff to join them on-site at Trillium Park Thursday to see the pollution firsthand and discuss the need for immediate remediation. For those that cannot attend, sample water bottles containing deteriorating crumb rubber pellets from these fields will be gifted to their Park Board desks along with a question about how the Park Board proposes to safely dispose of that pollution cocktail. “The Park Board needs to put a stop to the madness of exposing children to lead and other toxic chemicals in synthetic turf and take immediate action to remediate the pollution at Trillium Park, VanTech school, and other public sport fields in this city”, said Nicol. Nicol went on to say that “Adding more weekly soccer hours is not worth the costs of poisoning children, and polluting our streams, ocean and earth.”

Dr. Lanphear to the Park Board. “We used to think low level exposures to toxic chemical were too low to cause harm, but that is misleading . We described the impact of low-level exposures in the video, The Impact of Toxic Chemicals on the Developing Brain: www.littlethingsmatter.ca.” The residents say that they and many Vancouverites would like to see a vision for the City where organized sports and organic outdoor play happen on grass playing fields that are accessible to all, do not pose a risk to the long-term health of players and waterways, and that preserve ecosystem and climate-regulating benefits. They want to see a moratorium on all synthetic turf installations until a remediation and risk mitigation plan is implemented, and ultimately, see a greener solution created through collaborative planning with the communities.

Despite admitting the complete lack of long-term exposure studies of synthetic turf, Dr. Patricia Daly, Chief Medical Officer for Vancouver Coastal Health concluded in a letter to the Board in 2016, that “serious health risks, including cancer, are not increased”, essentially that synthetic turf fields are no risk to the public. In Canada, lead in interior paint was banned in 1960 and banned in gasoline, in 1990. Low levels of lead affect IQ, ability to pay attention and academic achievement.

Park Board has installed 13 synthetic turf fields to date, are planning another at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School, are still looking to install at Clinton Park and Beaconsfield Park, and 4 more synthetic turf fields by 2022.