

CalEPA / OEHHA Synthetic Turf Scientific Advisory Panel Meeting - May 25, 2018

(a surveyed compilation of opinions presented as public comment - Kelley Watts)

Frustrated Families Call Out for Action From 3rd California Synthetic Turf Study

At the very first meeting, a Synthetic Turf Scientific Advisory Panel member postulated, “even with the best research we can’t have a completely definitive resolution. And maybe we should say that now, and not three years from now”.

I couldn’t agree more.



This will probably be the last panel of this high caliber that will be convened in the United States for many years to come, regarding plastic synthetic turf risks.

I have been reporting on synthetic turf studies like this one for over a decade now, (in conjunction with the Huffington Post, NBC, ESPN, PBS, and other news outlets).

This particular study arose as a result of growing concerns and questions from the public. Questions such as — can exposing children to the materials and micro-pollutants in synthetic turf cause them to become sick? Can it give them diseases like cancer? Can it exacerbate existing illnesses?

Across our country I have met extraordinary families and public health advocates working for a positive change -- who are deeply frustrated by years of inertia, pushback, and irresponsibility by big businesses and government agendas. (Agendas, which are resistant to even the most fundamental proactive gestures – such as posting signs that would give fair warnings about the potential health risks -- warnings that would be especially useful for the most chemically sensitive and young children.)

Out of their frustration, they borrow the words of students today in voicing their anger about the politics of corruption and greed, and feel that it is appropriate, fair, and necessary to call out BS for the following reasons:

They call BS on -- the plastic synthetic turf and rubber manufacturing lobbyists and salesmen who repeatedly claim that introducing pulverized tire waste into children’s play areas as been proven to be safe -- it has not.

CalRecycle and CalEPA have met with the rubber and tire industries for years to create financial incentives to promote tire crumb (TDP) for use on synthetic turf – yet no studies, (including their own), have found exposure risks to tire crumb to be conclusive or without harm.

They call BS on -- this third virtually identical CalEPA/OEHHA turf study which once again uses the same inconclusive methodology -- which primarily involves testing minuscule teaspoon size samples of enormous, (1000s of tons), acres of chemical rich material that is heterogeneous and highly variable -- which will not meaningfully expand our knowledge. OEHHA has shown tire crumb to have an inconsistent chemical makeup of which over 38%, (by volume), are chemicals known to cause cancer and/or show high spikes, (such as lead).

Expensive tests involving bouncing a ball and having subjects run around on these fields add very little significant data.

This is in part because synthetic turf fields are very similar to sand boxes.

(As explained by a groundskeeper in the Bay Area, “There is no real world standardization to the amount of material used on each field – much less the materials’; depth, age, hardness (Gmax), dispersal, or particle size. Like sand in a sandbox the material is constantly being moved around and broken down. When you see a lot of crumb accumulating somewhere, that means it’s not somewhere else that it should be. It would need to be properly, evenly spread and replenished on a regular basis. (Despite manufacturers recommendations), in reality for many fields this is infrequently done, if ever”.)

In 2007 OEHHA reported, "our study indicates that California surfaces made of recycled tires commonly fail to meet the HIC standard, (head impact criterion), for impact attenuation specified in state regulations”.



CROCKER-AMAZON FIELD
SAN FRANCISCO, CA



GARFIELD FIELD
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

They call BS on -- the claim that CalEPA/OEHHA is practicing transparency when it refuses to post for scientific, media, and other third party review easily accessible and searchable transcripts of ALL of these meetings – not just some at the very end. This study has a budget of nearly \$3 million.

(As per a professional transcription service, “actually the process, (of transcription), is easier when working from recordings which can be started and stopped, than from live sessions”.)

They call BS on -- CalEPA/OEHHA for refusing to allow the media and the public to observe ANY sampling and testing -- even when human test subjects, (including professional athletes), and locations were offered, and who willingly volunteered for free to participate in the study for the public record.

According to OEHHA, in 2016, California had 902 synthetic turf fields. OEHHA spokespersons explained that the reason that the media was not being allowed to observe testing on site was because they couldn't find any site owners willing to publically participate (possibly out of liability fears -- perhaps that alone should be cause for posting public warnings). Also, it was suggested that the human participants would wish to remain anonymous. I was able to find a plethora of volunteers who were more than willing to participate without anonymity

They call BS on -- CalEPA's claims of inclusiveness. Nancy Alderman conducted the Yale University turf study and volunteered to serve on this panel. Athletes and scientific experts with years of experience on this topic were also excluded.

They call BS on -- the study timeline that could have taken months, (or a couple of years at most), that is now being dragged out for 4 years -- a substantial delay that profits the turf and rubber industries and their associates — but undermines the stated primary impetus of this study, regarding addressing the concerns of the public in a timely manner. Dropping the original Senate Bill (SB47) ban and **delaying for an additional year allows the synthetic turf industry more time to expand their business footprint.**

They call BS on -- anybody who holds in higher regard and protects the reputations, liabilities, or financial interests of the synthetic turf industry, the rubber manufacturing industries, or the recycling industries – over the health and welfare of the tens of the thousands of families that are exposed to the chemicals on these fields daily.

They call BS on -- anybody (or argument) which tries to justify not requiring basic warning signs that could at least forewarn the most vulnerable members of the public about the known chemical exposure before they put themselves or their family at risk.

CalEPA / OEHHA is the California agency mandated for warning the public about chemical health risks.

In California where one chemical in coffee requires warning signs to be posted – plastic and tire crumb synthetic turf with its many dozens of chemicals and toxins being released into our environment and into our bodies -- with over 38% (by volume) known to cause cancer – is, curiously, repeatedly being given a free pass, putting tens of thousands at risk.

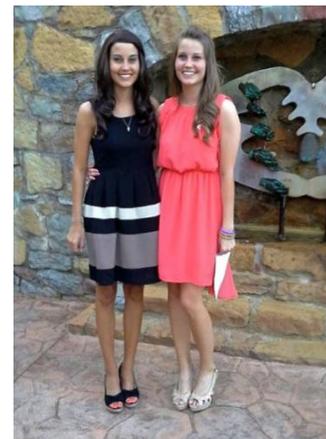
If a panel like this one courageously took a stand and made a strong statement, the posting of warnings could happen. Loopholes and excuses would be addressed.



I sincerely thank all of the panel members for the important responsibility you have taken upon yourselves, as you will now be considered the de facto experts.

When the government and big business try to suppress inconvenient truths – it is trusted scientists like you who we count on to stand up for our most vulnerable.

Kelley Watts
public comment



Luke Beardemphl (goalie) died of cancer at age 24 (LUKESTRONG)

Austen Everett (goalie) died of cancer at age 25 (The Austen Everett Foundation – UNITE2FIGHT)

McKenzie Hicks fought a second bout of Hodgkin's lymphoma (nursing student)

A former star college player, McKenzie regularly practiced in tire crumb as a teenager. Her cancer-free identical twin sister Molly chose to be a cheerleader, (thus avoiding the tire crumb). Fortunately, Molly was able to serve as a blood donor for McKenzie.

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ADDENDUM

A member of the CalEPA / OEHHA Synthetic Turf Scientific Advisory Panel said at the very first meeting, **“Sort of the default policy is that this is safe. Well how certain are we about that. I’m not too certain. I think there is a lot of uncertainty.”**

That’s the kind of forthrightness and inspiring leadership that is needed today on this issue. *Not just in California, but nationally as well. An honesty that doesn’t let corporate and government agendas subtly overwhelm the integrity of science and compassion.*

My good friend, author Wendell Berry once wrote, “Whether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do.

I work with scientific and news sources across the country -- as well as the public. Based on additional feedback, they also call BS on:

- the irresponsibility of Federal Agencies like **EPA, CPSC, CDC, NIH** and others that have abdicated their responsibilities regarding this health issue over to this California state study --instead of doing their own independent due diligence, and formulating their own conclusions.
- the irresponsibility of California State Agencies, (other than **CalEPA** and **CalRecycle**) – like the **California Coastal Commission** which in 2014 ignored the scientific recommendations and advice of their own staff which would have blocked a large tire crumb synthetic turf project at a coastal location. One of the politically appointed Coastal commissioners glibly dismissed the science in their staff report as “minutia”.
- the irresponsibility of local agencies like **San Francisco Rec & Parks Department**, whose associates pocketed over \$50 million dollars over **5 years** installing tire crumb fields – while concurrently making plans to have them dug up and replaced with less toxic fields after completion. Within months of the project’s last installation the first fields were already being replaced -- at additional taxpayer expense.
- Finally from a student, “Whatever happened to that unanimous Senate Bill ban? This study is a time waster that exploits the careers and reputation of some scientists and panders to us”.
(CA Senate Bill SB47, (introduced by Senator Jerry Hill), passed unanimously in 2015 by the California Senate. It originally called for a ban on new installations during the study but was later amended to allow for installations to continue – then the study was extended for an additional year.)

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public comment