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Sports fields made of recycled tires score points in EPA study

By James E. Guyette

A just-released study from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is being greeted as good news by the tire recycling industry because the research has determined that crumb rubber products used on athletic fields and playgrounds are not harmful.

"The EPA is the latest agency to come to the same conclusion: Crumb rubber used in artificial turf or as a playground surface poses no significant health or environmental risk," reports Jeffrey Kendall, chairman and CEO of Liberty Tire Recycling.

He adds that "we have been very concerned by recent headlines suggesting the opposite is true. Parents, business owners, public policy makers and elected officials deserve to know the facts, and they now have the facts from the authority on these matters."

"The study further validates the statements of safety by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and other governmental agencies, including the New York State Dept of Environmental Conservation and Dept of Health, the New York City Dept of Health, and the California EPA in recent studies," according to Rick Doyle, president of the Synthetic Turf Council.

The EPA conducted its field research from August through October of 2008, taking samples from multiple locations in different parts of the country. No tire-related fibers were found in the air samples and "all air concentrations of particulate matter and lead were well below levels of concern."

"The general public will benefit from the detailed and clear presentation of the study's results," says Doyle.

The EPA's report can be viewed at http://www.epa.gov/nerl/features/tire_crumbs.html.

"In state after state and in study after study, researchers have confirmed that crumb rubber is safe," Kendall contends.

"People have a right to be concerned about their health and the health and safety of their children," he says. "The findings of these studies and the EPA study should ease any concerns that people might have about products that are made from recycled rubber tires. They're safe."

Kendall cites several environmental and safety benefits provided by the use of recycled tire materials on sports fields and playgrounds: It doesn't decompose or blow away, it's non-toxic and it won't harbor insects or mold. A six-inch layer of rubber safety surfacing can cushion a child's fall from as high as 12 feet.

In addition, replacing a grass field with a synthetic surface made of rubber can save as much as 50,000 gallons of water per week during the peak growing season while also eliminating application of fertilizers and pesticides, he notes.

"Each year, products made from recycled rubber prevent 25 million used tires from ending up in landfills across the country," says Kendall.

"From safer playground surfaces and decorative rubber mulch to materials used in road paving projects, (the company) is pleased to be on the cutting edge of transforming rubber tires into the raw materials that become versatile, useful products for the consumer," he observes.

Based in Pittsburgh, Liberty reclaims nearly one-third of the nation's scrap tires, according to Kendall, who notes that the recycled rubber is also used as industrial feedstock for molded products; as tire-derived fuel for industrial kilns, mills and power plants; and as rubber mulch for landscaping. The company maintains a nationwide network of processing plants and comprehensive "door-to-door collection services" for tire dealers.

For more information, visit www.libertytire.com and www.syntheticurfouncil.org.