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Lead Levels in Artificial Turf Are Ruled Safe

By **ROSS KENNETH URKEN**
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The government's consumer-products watchdog issued a report concluding that artificial-turf sports fields are safe, despite concerns about possible health risks from lead paint used in the synthetic grass.

The report, by the Consumer Products Safety Commission, found that none of the fields it tested released amounts of lead that would be harmful to children. In its evaluation, the staff assumed that particles on a child's hand transferred to his or her mouth would be the most likely route of exposure, and it determined young children would not be at risk.



Associated Press

Josh Sarratt checks Bobcat Stadium's new artificial surface at Montana State University.

were randomly tested and found to have lead levels significantly higher than what is considered safe by the U.S. government.

Although the study found no harmful lead levels, the CPSC staff called for synthetic-turf makers to agree voluntarily not to use lead in their products.

Lead is used in the pigments of some synthetic-grass fibers, and it can be released into the air through sunlight and wear. Concerns that it could then be ingested were heightened this spring when synthetic fields in Newark, N.J.,

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The finding sparked broader testing throughout New Jersey. Nine public schools closed their turf fields this spring and have not decided whether to reopen them for the fall season.

The report was welcome news for companies like FieldTurf, a unit of Tarkett Group, which has 65% of the U.S. synthetic-turf market. There are about 5,000 turf fields in the U.S., according to the Montreal-based company, whose sales have grown at about 20% annually over the past three years, Chief Executive Joe Fields said. Other major players in the turf-field business include Specialty Surfaces International Inc.'s Sprinturf and Kiefer Specialty Flooring Inc.'s Sportex.

Normal levels of lead are 400 milligrams per kilogram of soil. At two schools in New Jersey, one in Old Tappan and the other in Demarest, studies showed levels at 4,000 and 6,300 lead milligrams per kilogram of soil, Superintendent Jan Furman says.

Mr. Fields says the standards for soil cannot be applied to turf because the lead in turf is contained within the fibers.

Write to Ross Kenneth Urken at ross.urken@wsj.com

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