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STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES



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Heather How
Commissioner

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For Further Information Contact:
Donna Leus
609-984-7
Marilyn R
609-984-7

DHSS Calls for Federal Action on Potential Lead Hazard Posed by Artificial Turf

NOTE: Press availability scheduled for 4 p.m. today. Please see end of release for details.

Health and Senior Services Commissioner Heather Howard has urged the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to investigate the artificial turf used on athletic fields, play areas and in homes, after New Jersey testing found high lead levels in selected samples of turf fibers.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services tested 12 artificial turf fields at municipal parks and colleges, and found that two had lead levels eight to ten times above the state's residential soil standard for cleanup of contaminated properties. DHSS also tested samples of turf marketed for residential use. Two samples had similarly high lead levels.

It is not known whether lead from turf can be absorbed by the body as easily as lead from other sources such as lead paint or contaminated soil. Specialized tests are pending on the high-lead turf samples that can provide more information. Results are expected by early May.

The most conservative approach would be to limit access to the fields that have been identified with lead. Based on the limited information we have at this time, the Department's assessment is that there is a very low risk for exposure. The risk of exposure can be reduced by proper maintenance of the

field, including wetting down the field. Users of the field should wash properly and ensure that their clothing is washed after play.

The tested turf was composed of either nylon, polyethylene, or a mixture of the two. High lead levels were seen only in artificial turf containing nylon fibers.

“This is a potential consumer safety issue with national implications, since these turf products are widely distributed. While we are doing additional testing on the samples, we recommend that field managers exercise caution to protect against potential exposures for those who use the fields where high lead levels were found,” Commissioner Howard said.

Deputy Commissioner and State Epidemiologist, Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, requested further investigation of the turf issue in an April 11, 2008 letter to Patricia Semple, executive director of the CPSC. The federal agency is charged with protecting the public from dangerous consumer products.

DHSS discovered lead in artificial turf while assisting the federal Environmental Protection Agency in an investigation of a metals scrap yard in Newark. DHSS collected and tested dust and fibers from an adjacent turf field on which children were playing. The Department found high lead levels in the turf fibers, and recommended the field be closed, which was done.

The Department first contacted the CPSC last December to give the agency the lead testing results and express concern that the findings could have nationwide impact. CPSC said it did not have sufficient information to take any action, prompting DHSS to do further sampling. As a result, the DHSS decided to test additional turf sites and other consumer turf products.

Artificial turf fibers were randomly tested at 12 sites. These 10 sites were found not to have high lead levels:

- Van Fleet Park, Fort Lee, Bergen County
- Memorial Park and Kennedy Park, Borough of Lodi, Bergen County
- Memorial Park, Park Ridge, Bergen County
- Church Square Park and Steven’s Park, Hoboken, Hudson County
- Mercer County College Soccer Field, West Windsor, Mercer County
- The College of New Jersey Soccer Field, Ewing Township, Mercer County
- Smithfield Park and Veteran’s Park, Parsippany, Morris County.

The two sites containing elevated lead levels were Frank Sinatra Park at 5th Street, Hoboken and The College of New Jersey’s Lion’s Stadium Field in Ewing. Three fields in Hoboken were tested and the other two fields were far below the DEP soil cleanup criteria. A second field at the College of New Jersey, a soccer field, was tested and did not have lead detected above lab reporting standards.

Both were notified of the results today. Both Hoboken Mayor David Roberts and the College of New Jersey have been extremely cooperative and will continue to work with the Department on the best course of action.

There are no national guidelines for lead in artificial turf. In the absence of guidance, the DHSS is using the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s residential soil cleanup criteria for

lead of 400 mg/Kg.

“We do not know the health impact -- if any – that may result in people who used these fields,” said Dr. Bresnitz. “One concern is that, for children who live in homes with lead-based paint or who have had other lead exposures, any lead from turf would just add to the lead levels in their bodies.”

Please visit the DHSS web site at www.nj.gov/health/artificialturf for fact sheets and additional information.

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PRESS AVAILABILITY: Dr. Bresnitz and Consumer and Environmental Health Services staff will be available by teleconference today at 4 p.m. to discuss this issue and answer questions. To participate, call 1-888-622-5357. The participation code is 167706.