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PA Gotbaum: City Must Issue an Immediate Moratorium on the Installation of Artificial Turf

Synthetic Turf Field Shut Down in East Harlem after Testing Revealed High Lead Levels; Public Advocate has been calling on City to test turf for two years

MANHATTAN - Public Advocate Gotbaum, a former New York City Parks Department Commissioner, and Geoffrey Croft of NYC Park Advocates today called on the city to issue an immediate moratorium of the installation of artificial turf fields until physical testing of all current artificial turf fields has been completed. The Parks Department yesterday announced it was closing the synthetic field at Thomas Jefferson Park after discovering high levels of lead in the field. According to the Parks Department, "Thomas Jefferson is part of a research project examining air samples collected at synthetic-turf fields." The Public Advocate has been calling on the city for two years to test the synthetic turf in parks.

Public Advocate Gotbaum said, "For two years, I have called for independent physical testing of the synthetic turf in our parks. For two years, the city has dragged its heels, insisting that there was no cause for concern. And now, the city has announced that it is closing a synthetic turf field because of elevated lead levels. While I am glad to see the city listened to us and began testing turf fields, we don't know how many people have been exposed to this lead hazard. What we do know is that the city can no longer ignore our concerns. I expect a full and public disclosure of the results of the testing currently underway, and I renew my call for an immediate moratorium on the installation of new synthetic turf until New Yorkers can be assured that it is safe."

"The fact that the city could not be bothered to conduct a single environmental study in ten years before spending more than \$ 150 million dollars speaks volumes," said Geoffrey Croft, president of NYC Park Advocates. "Dumping more than 50 million pounds of a product which is wildly known to contain a host of metals, including lead, arsenic and cadmium, into our park system is irresponsible at best. The city should instead be installing natural grass which cleans the air and filters out harmful particulate matter and provides a host of other environmental benefits."

In April, 2007 Public Advocate Gotbaum called for independent testing of rubber pellets that may potentially pose serious health risks to New Yorkers. The rubber pellets, used in more than 70 athletic fields throughout the city, are made from recycled tires that contain chemicals that have been linked to birth defects, cancer and other health problems. The health risks to families and kids playing on the turf remain unknown.

In February, 2008, Public Advocate Gotbaum, along with New Yorkers for Parks, Natural Resources Defense Council, and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest sent a letter to Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Commissioner Thomas Frieden and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. The letter requested that the Parks Department issue an immediate moratorium on the installation of artificial turf. It also requested that the Parks Department create a replacement schedule for existing turf fields, regardless of toxicity

because they break down over time and become unusable and that Parks share this schedule with the City Council and community boards. The letter also urged the DOHMH to immediately conduct tests of the different types of artificial turf fields that have been installed in city parks, and expedite its literature review of potential adverse health effects of artificial turf.

Last week in Dallas Texas, fields in two well-known high school stadiums, including the one made famous by the book and movie "Friday Night Lights," were announced to have lead levels far exceeding the Environmental Protection Agency's standard for soil, according to independent tests done within the last month.

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