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California Senate Passes Bill to Investigate Safety of Synthetic Turf Fields

SB 1277 will ensure the safety and health of our children

(Sacramento, CA)—In response to numerous reports of excessive lead content and other health issues related to synthetic turf fields, the California State Senate today passed SB 1277. This bill, authored by Senator Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria), will require the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, in conjunction with the Department of Public Health and California Integrated Waste Management Board, to conduct a study investigating the health and environmental impacts of natural versus synthetic turf fields.

“Thousands of children across the state play on these fields every day of the week. Recent studies conducted in New Jersey and across the nation indicate that there could be serious problems with these fields,” Maldonado commented. “Excessive levels of lead on some older fields in New Jersey prompted the closure of two fields. It is important that we know our children are using safe and healthy playing surfaces.”

SB 1277 will require a report be made available to the Legislature no later than September 1, 2010 regarding any health and/or safety impacts related to synthetic and natural turf fields. Synthetic turf fields, which have increased in popularity over the past several years, are made up of a combination of polyethylene plastics and recycled tires. The presence of volatile organic chemicals from these tires, as well as deadly bacteria that can remain on the synthetic grass blades, has prompted several states to take a closer look at potential negative impacts associated with these fields.

Studies have shown that athletes who use synthetic turf are seven times more likely to receive open skin lesions (referred to as turf burn). These open lesions are often the source of contracting and vehicle for spreading dangerous infections. In fact, a 2003 study of MRSA infections among St. Louis Rams football players found that all eight MRSA infections began at turf burn sites.

“Medical experts have found that *staphylococci* and other bacteria can survive on polyethylene plastic, the compound used to make synthetic turf blades, for more than 90 days. Blood, sweat, skin cells and other materials can remain on the synthetic turf because the fields are not washed or cleaned. In short, playing on these fields is like playing on a giant used band aid. I am glad to see that the Senate recognized the importance of further investigating the safety of these fields,” Maldonado concluded.

In addition to authoring SB 1277, Senator Maldonado has asked the California Attorney General, Jerry Brown, to look into whether these fields should have a Proposition 65 warning. The Attorney General has indicated he will investigate the matter and will have a decision in the next month.

SB 1277 passed off the Senate Floor with a vote of 28-6 and will next be transferred to the Assembly.

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