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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
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NICK ROSSL, STAFF DIRECTOR
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January 21, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to request that your administration spearhead a comprehensive study and assessment of the safety of artificial turf surfaces infilled with “crumb rubber.”

Crumb rubber consists of recycled scrap tires grounded into small particles, which are then incorporated into the synthetic turf as infill. These artificial surfaces have been installed in playgrounds and sports fields all across the country.

Unfortunately, recent reports indicate that these surfaces may pose serious health risks, including cancer, to individuals who come into frequent contact with them. As such, we believe this issue warrants scrutiny from U.S. government agencies with expertise in public health and consumer safety.

The existing body of knowledge on the safety of crumb rubber is incomplete. Nonetheless, one disturbing report finds that there may be a correlation between crumb rubber and cancer. Specifically, according to University of Washington soccer coach Amy Griffin, and as reported by ESPN, there are now 153 reported cancer cases involving athletes who spent significant periods of time playing on synthetic turf with crumb rubber infill. Of these cases, 124 of the athletes are soccer players, 85 of whom played goalie. Given that millions of children and young athletes play on crumb rubber synthetic surfaces every day, this correlation with cancer cannot be ignored.

Last November, we wrote a letter to Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) Chairman Elliot Kaye urging the Commission to initiate an independent investigation on the safety of crumb rubber turf. According to Chairman Kaye, the CPSC will be working with the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment to determine the possible health risks that crumb rubber poses.

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This is a laudable effort, and we appreciate the CPSC's response. However, we believe that a more comprehensive federal study on this matter, one that draws not only from the public safety expertise of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, but from the public health and environmental expertise of agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Environmental Protection Agency, would more fully inform the public on any potential public health or safety impacts associated with crumb rubber. Accordingly, we ask that your administration coordinate a comprehensive initiative that effectively utilizes all of the relevant agencies that can provide insight on the health and safety crumb rubber.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



Bill Nelson
Ranking Member



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Consumer Protection, Product Safety,
Insurance, and Data Security

CC: The Honorable John Thune, Chairman