

## SAFE HEALTHY PLAYING FIELDS INC

Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Dear Mayor Bowser, DC City Council Members, et al.,

**I am writing on behalf of Safe Healthy Playing Fields Inc., to apprise you of potentially elevated lead and arsenic findings on a DC public school playground, and to request a virtual meeting with you as soon as possible.**

On September 22 and 23, 2020, Chis Nidel, J.D., M.S. Chemical Engineering, along with a member of Safe Healthy Playing Fields, visited Janney Elementary School with an [Olympus Avanta XRF](#). Onsite testing of several areas of the “poured in place” (PIP) playground was conducted. This testing was a follow-up to previous testing and recommendations by the independent lab at the Ecology Center, and by the DC-hired industrial hygienists from SaLUT. Not surprisingly, our tests confirmed a common pattern: a variety of lead-level findings from undetectable to very high. Mr. Nidel will send a statement separately, but we did not want to delay our notification to you. [Here are photographs of the XRF readings at Janney Elementary \(September 22 and 23, 2020\).](#)

The material in PIP playgrounds is heterogenous, which means that it is made up of unpredictable combinations of its components. Many of these are potentially toxic and often include waste products. They are unregulated for use by children. In addition, PIP is composed of an unregulated mixed stream of undisclosed source materials. Therefore, no two areas on a playground are necessarily the same.

In June 2019 the non-profit Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) released [this statement about the previous high lead results at Janney, Takoma, and Truesdell playgrounds](#): “The fact is that the lead content across any one [synthetic rubber] playground is highly variable. Therefore, if one sample results in acceptable levels of lead, it does not mean that the previous samples with high levels of lead have been invalidated.”

The heterogeneity of this material is borne out by the multiple tests on the Janney playground. The two separate samplings conducted by the Ecology Center ([report here; chain of custody here](#)), the multiple samplings by SaLUT ([report here](#)), and the two separate samplings conducted by Mr. Nidel all yielded different results, from undetectable to very high. In an ill-advised [statement](#), DC asserted that one set of findings of zero/undetectable lead in specific spots of a large area definitively negates all prior or subsequent findings of elevated lead from other locations on that surface. This is simply not correct and denies the science of the issue.

High lead levels have also been found on PIP playgrounds in Montgomery County, MD, where different samples again yielded a variety of results. Montgomery County’s industrial hygienist addressed the variability in testing results in [this report](#), stating in part, “If laboratory error is ruled out, the higher initial test results could be caused by the heterogeneous nature of the rubberized material surfacing systems”.

Similarly, Prince George’s County, MD, closed two playgrounds following high lead findings by the Ecology Center. [This news report](#) includes the photo below, which shows that the lead runs **through** the single shred. The lead is neither from an external source, nor is it limited to the surface.



**Notably, there were no nearby buildings or known legacy lead to even conceivably be the original source of the elevated lead levels on those Prince George's County playgrounds.**

Toxicologist Dr. David Brown sent DCPS and DGS [this letter](#) on May 19, 2019 on behalf of the non-profit Environment and Human Health Inc. (EHHI). Dr Brown stated, regarding the Janney playground, "Children are exposed to the materials as they shed from the playground, from the edges, when the play surface is in disrepair, or when holes or rips develop gradually or suddenly. These surfaces are never solid, and begin to dust and crumble right after they are installed, so it is never possible to claim that they are 'well-maintained' or that the materials within are 'contained.' These surfaces undergo constant heat, rain, sun, jumping, running, and impact."

In 2019, [the report commissioned by DC DGS](#) attributed the high lead levels on parts of the Janney playground surface to chips of leaded paint from a bay window of the school building. The report said that the issue would be addressed through remediation of the paint and regular cleaning and power washing of the playground surface. Power washing is not an acceptable way to remediate lead for two reasons: First because it disperses any surface lead that may be present into the surrounding area and groundwater; second because power washing cannot remove lead from inside materials that may contain it. Claims to the contrary from SaLUT's industrial hygienist are incorrect. In this video the SaLUT industrial hygienist discusses how his team power washed the leaded playground materials into the storm drains. [Part 1: Powerwashing into storm drains](#) and [Part 2 Powerwashing into storm drains](#). We urge you to order an immediate halt to this ill-advised procedure.

Our testing last week yielded a mix of results that is similar to prior testing results: readings ranged from undetectable to very high, in materials retrieved from both the surface area and pitted areas. The probability is extremely remote that these diverse lead contamination levels all originated exclusively from the paint on a single window some 150 feet away.

These alarming lead findings remain unaddressed, even as they continue to accumulate, and even as neighboring jurisdictions find similar lead levels on their playgrounds and promptly close them down.

Beyond this lead problem, we remain very concerned about the other PIP issues we have raised to the DC government and agencies including [high PAH levels](#); [58 identified carcinogens](#); [potential failure to](#)

[meet fall safety standards](#); and dangerously [hot surface temperatures](#). We remind you of our [endorsed policy recommendations linked in this letter](#) in our letter of July, 2018.

And now arsenic must be added to that list. These recent tests also revealed potentially high arsenic levels, providing yet another concerning data point.

We are concerned because these issues have not been adequately addressed. We urgently request a meeting to discuss the situation. We ask that you acknowledge receipt of this email today, and advise us of a possible schedule for a virtual meeting. We look forward to a productive conversation.

Sincerely,  
Diana Conway  
President, Safe Healthy Playing Fields Inc.  
[dianaconway@outlook.com](mailto:dianaconway@outlook.com)  
C: 240-997-0404  
[www.safehealthyplayingfields.org](http://www.safehealthyplayingfields.org)