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Turf Supreme with Trimec Used on Sports Fields: Is The AUHSD Putting Children At Risk?

By Sophie Braccini

During the summer of 2009, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) dispersed on the Campolindo fields a product called Turf Supreme 16-6-8 plus Trimec. The District used what it calls a fertilizer that includes an herbicide with low level toxicity to remove clover (clover is linked to ankle and knee injury according to the District). Parents for a Safer Environment (PfSE) says research shows the product's active ingredients have health risks including potentially putting adolescents at risk for cancer later in life. Although District administrators and PfSE reached an agreement a year ago to reduce the use of pesticides in the District, they continue to disagree about what is "safe" to use. During the public comment period of the Sept. 9 AUHSD Board meeting, parents lined up to express their concerns about the usage of Turf Supreme over the summer, as well as the list of chemicals that will be used by the district in the future. "Parents were not informed of the use of Turf Supreme this summer, and many groups and teams practice on those fields," said Carol Shenon, a Campolindo parent. "We do not have to send notices when school is out," AUHSD Associate Superintendent Chris Learned answered, "but we posted notices on the field as requested by law. According to the information I researched, this product has a low level of toxicity. The safety of the children is our first priority and we would never have used that product if we thought it posed a risk to their well being." Learned also noted that following the Sept. 8, 2009, verbal agreement with PfSE the District stopped using the three most dangerous products PfSE had identified. The parents remain unconvinced. "Turf Supreme contains one chemical that is a known reproductive/developmental toxin and another that is a possible carcinogen and a suspected endocrine disruptor (a toxin that interferes with the hormonal systems of humans)," Shenon said. "We have seen in the past that products that we felt were safe are discovered years later to be a major risk," added PfSE director Susan JunFish. "Adolescents are very vulnerable to endocrine disruptors that are attacking their developing hormone systems. We do not want to make the same mistake and discover in twenty years that we put our sons and daughters at risk for hormone-related cancers because we wanted to prevent ankle injury." Shenon does not want to antagonize the District. "I don't want this to be confrontational," she said. "We can learn from our mistakes and work together to draft a policy that keeps students safe, will allow parents to stay informed, and if the administration changes, we will feel confident that the pesticide use rules won't." Learned said that possible adoption of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy will be discussed at by the AUHSD Board at its early November meeting. He added that the District is favorable to reasonable and practical solutions that take into account the District's limited resources.

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