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Coming up in the
March 22 PARADE:
World's 10 Worst
Dictators



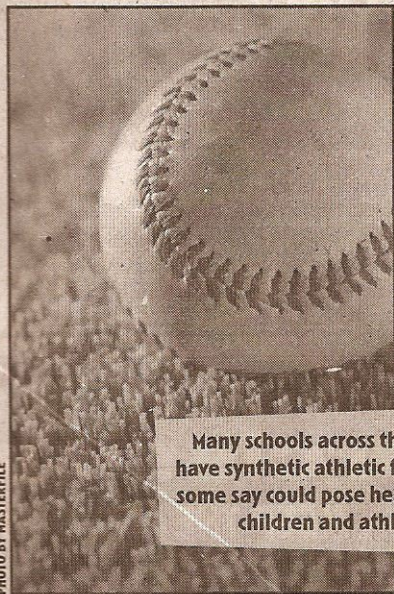
Are Synthetic Athletic Fields Safe?

Across the country, countless cities, towns, and schools have installed synthetic turf to replace grass fields at athletic facilities. The turf fields are more durable, dry faster, and require less maintenance than grass. They gained popularity earlier this decade. Now, however, support has waned. Synthetic fields can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars,

forcing schools and cities to take on huge debts. But there are health concerns as well. Some worry that fraying AstroTurf surfaces that have been in place for years are contaminated with

lead and could pose a health hazard to

children, athletes, and others who use them. In New York and New Jersey, at least a half-dozen fields a decade old or more have been closed because of concern about high levels of lead in the turf fibers. There are also worries over a newer type of turf that uses crumb-rubber infill. This material often includes bits of recycled tires among the turf blades to provide a cushioned surface. These fields have been installed at thousands of schools, public parks, and indoor sports facilities across the country, and more are scheduled. States are investigating their health effects, and some legislators have asked the Environmental Protection Agency to study them as well. For schools with deteriorating fields, it is a difficult dilemma.



Many schools across the country have synthetic athletic fields, which some say could pose health risks to children and athletes.