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Association Releases Information Regarding Use of PVC in Play Equipment

HARRISBURG, PA – The International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association (IPEMA) explained today that play equipment manufacturers use many types of products when developing their play systems and noted the organization promotes and encourages the highest standards for playground safety.

Recently published information asserts that PVC, a form of plastic used on certain commercial play system components such as decks and handrails, is “poisonous to all ecosystems” and “a potential health risk.” IPEMA member companies and certified participants utilize steel, aluminum, wood, PVC, polyethylene and polyurea in the manufacturing of play equipment. IPEMA does not dictate or recommend whether its members use PVC in their products. It is the choice of the individual member.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) determines and guides the safety issues facing the playground equipment industry. CPSC staff has studied the claimed dangers of PVC and has determined that PVC is not a safety issue on playground equipment. (Reference: Response to Petition HP 99-1). IPEMA members follow the guidelines of the CPSC and will respond appropriately if the CPSC identifies PVC as a playground hazard.

IPEMA President Tim Ahern stated, “There is absolutely no data, none, to support the notion that PVC will harm or injure children who play on PVC coated play equipment. IPEMA is always interested in reviewing new safety information, including any independent, third-party, scientific studies concerning PVC in playground equipment.”

In asserting its position on PVC use, IPEMA also provided the following background information:

- In addition to the CPSC response, the EPA found vinyl manufacturing to be just 2% of the total source of dioxin-like compounds released in the year 2000. In fact, between 1987 and 2000 there was approximately a 90% reduction in the release of dioxin-like compounds to the circulating environment of the United States from all known sources combined. (Reference: EPA, "An Inventory of Sources and Environmental Releases of Dioxin-Like Compounds in the U.S. for the Years 1987, 1995, and 2000" (EPA/600/P-03/002f, Final Report, November 2006)
- Neither PVC production nor PVC incineration is a significant source of chlorinated dioxins in the environment. Most of these dioxins which are currently produced in the US come from natural sources (e.g. forest fires). The US PVC industry which produces billions of pounds of PVC each year produces approximately one ounce of "dioxin" annually and burning PVC produces no more dioxin than burning anything else. A 1995 study of dioxin formation in 169 incinerators worldwide found no statistical correlation between chlorine in waste streams and dioxin emissions. (Reference: H. G. Rigo, A. J. Chandler, W. S. Lanier, The Relationship between Chlorine in Waste Streams and Dioxin Emissions From Waste Combustor Stacks:an ASME Research Report (Crtd Series Vol. 36), American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 1995)
- Studies have shown that f-PVC additives are not leached from landfill PVC products. (Reference: I. Mersiowsky, M. Weller, J. Ejlertsson, Water Research, 35, 3063-3070, 2001)
- PVC (like most other landfill materials including paper) does not biodegrade easily. However, that's not a bad thing. There are no concerns about potentially toxic degradation products. PVC products (which can be compacted under pressure) occupy a very small fraction of space, perhaps 1%, in US landfills. (Reference: I. Mersiowsky, Journal of Vinyl & Additive Technology, 8, 36-44, 2002)
- PVC is also very recyclable. Up to half of the flexible PVC products on the market contain post industrial recycled material. Post consumer flexible PVC is also recyclable and with government programs making recycled PVC more attractive this type of material is at last finding its place alongside virgin PVC products. (Reference: See Vinyl 2010, The Voluntary Commitment of the PVC Industry, October, 2001, a standard issued jointly by the European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers, the European Plastics Converters, The European Council for Plasticisers and Intermediates and the European Stabiliser Producers Association)

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- Like all materials, including wood, steel, aluminum, polyethylene and polyurea, PVC has strengths and weaknesses. Only by looking at its entire lifecycle and performance benefits can a company judge what product best serves its needs.
- When viewed from a comprehensive perspective that includes its safety performance and environmental profile, PVC performs as well or better than any other material now available. On the playground it is both inert and safe.
- PVC is used almost universally as a coating on playstructure decks as well as many other playground components.
- PVC has excellent thermal insulating properties to help moderate extreme temperatures, making it a great coating for playgrounds.
- PVC eliminates sharp edges of metal decks and the seating surfaces of park benches.
- PVC protects decks from rust and corrosion and is extremely durable. Use of PVC in this application maximizes the life of playstructure decks.
- PVC is fire resistant and will not sustain burning once the flame source is removed.

IPEMA provides a voluntary third-party product certification to ASTM safety standards in the U.S. and Canada for playground products. Those interested in learning more about play equipment and surfacing safety are encouraged to visit www.ipema.org.

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