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[Police Report](#) [Opinion](#) **DCR removes tire mulch from local playgrounds**

By David Taber December 3, 2010

SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR—Citing maintenance concerns, the state Department of Conservation has decided to replace the controversial “recycled rubber mulch” groundcover—made from old tires—with woodchips at three Jamaica Plain playgrounds along the Southwest Corridor Park.

“They were actually out there taking the mulch out this morning,” Abigail Hykin, a member of JP Moms, an advocacy group that launched a campaign against the rubber mulch last summer, told the Gazette Nov. 16. New playgrounds at Amory Street, New Minton Street and Williams Street along the corridor were installed last spring and the rubber mulch groundcover was put in at that time.

The JP Moms group’s efforts to get rid of the rubber mulch were based on fears that regular exposure to volatile organic compounds in the tires might have long-term negative health impacts. Some also said that exposure to the tires caused them to have respiratory issues, and complained that the light-weight material is easily spread throughout the park and carried home in children’s’ clothes.

“We’re thrilled that DCR listened to the community and did the right thing. Now everyone can enjoy these playgrounds, including those of us with asthma, latex allergies, chemical sensitivities and everyone who just wants to limit their children’s exposure to environmental toxins,” Audrey White, another member of JP Moms, told the Gazette in an e-mail.

JP Moms recently sent a letter to Gov. Deval Patrick, signed by over 150 people, calling for the removal of the mulch.

“The community of Jamaica Plain has spoken. I am happy that [DCR Commissioner Rick Sullivan] decided to take out the mulch,” local State rep. Jeffrey Sánchez told the Gazette.

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In an open letter, addressed “Dear Jamaica Plain neighbor,” dated Nov. 17, Sullivan said, “DCR has decided, based primarily on maintenance issues, to replace the rubber mulch...with engineered wood chips. DCR appreciates the community’s concerns regarding the safety of the mulch, but continues to believe it is appropriate for these playgrounds based on Environmental Protection Agency data and the agency’s own testing.”

He said the tire mulch is softer than wood chips “and therefore may be safer.”

Sánchez echoed Sullivan’s statement that maintenance is the main issue. “It leaves a literal carbon footprint,” when it gets tracked around the neighborhood, he said of the mulch.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) web site lists 30 compounds or materials “that may be found in tires” including the toxins acetone, arsenic, lead and mercury. The mere presence of those chemicals does not imply toxicity, though. There have only been scant studies of the health effects of the recycled tire materials and there is no conclusive evidence that they are toxic, according to a factsheet on the EPA web site.

But parents have said that they are concerned that the impacts of regular, long-term exposure to those chemicals have not been studied in depth.

“Our kids love the playground and will be really happy to go and play there,” said Hykin.

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