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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Possible Lead Exposure Risk for Children Identified in Outdoor Play Mat at Cal Poly

Parents of Children Enrolled in Child Development Preschool Laboratory Notified

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly environmental health and safety staff discovered last week the presence of lead in an outdoor play mat used by children enrolled in the university's part-time Child Development Preschool Laboratory – a unit of the College of Liberal Arts Psychology and Child Development Department.

At this time the lead exposure risk from the play mat is considered low, in part because children attend the preschool three days a week, for two and one half hours day.

The lead was found during a pre-maintenance inspection for the preschool which is located across from the Kennedy Library. The preschool is not connected to the ASI Children's Center on campus, which is a full-time daycare center.

San Luis Obispo County Public Health Agency's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention specialists were contacted immediately and are now working with the university to address the problem and provide parents with assistance, information and resources.

"This is a most unfortunate event, and we are truly sorry for any stress and concerns that parents of our preschoolers may have," said Larry Kelley, vice president for administration and finance. "The health and safety of children enrolled in any Cal Poly program is of the utmost importance to us. We are taking every precaution to ensure that parents are informed and have the resources they need to deal effectively with the situation."

During maintenance work to replace a fence and two sheds in the play yard, staff noticed that a play mat in the yard had weathered and was creating dust, which caused concern given many recent finding of lead in a variety of consumer items.

A preliminary wipe sample from the play mat surface yielded 766 micrograms of lead per square foot – which is considered within safe limits according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's lead exposure standards, the industry standard. (HUD standards indicate that materials containing more than 800 micrograms per square foot of lead are hazardous and should be removed.)

However, because the sample was in the high end of the safe range, a second, more thorough testing was conducted.

The second sample, obtained in a much more rigorous sampling process, yielded more than 1,341 micrograms of lead per square foot.

County public health officials are recommending that parents of recent preschool attendees consult their

pediatricians to discuss the matter and obtain a lead-level blood test to determine if there is any cause for concern. The university will pay for any un-reimbursed medical expenses related to lead testing.

Laurie Salo, a registered environmental health specialist with the Public Health Department's Division of Environmental Health Services, says that the presence of lead in a rubber play mat is not a usual suspect. "Federally funded housing assessments evaluate painted surfaces for potential lead exposure but not necessarily material that is not suspected to contain lead."

The play mat was manufactured when many of the substances now known to be hazardous were considered safe.

Janice Babos, a public health nurse and the coordinator of the San Luis Obispo County Health Department's Childhood Lead Prevention Program, says that the discovery of lead in the play mat is the first she's heard of in the industry.

"Cal Poly should be commended for recognizing a possible lead exposure and taking the correct measures to inform parents and clean up the preschool. Lead exposure from play mats is not a known source and has not previously been identified as a risk exposure that is known," she explained.

The university's environmental health and safety staff and facilities services staff are working with Millennium Consulting Associates, an environmental health mitigation firm, to identify and address any materials that contain lead to ensure a safe laboratory environment.

A new play mat will be installed in the play yard, as will new footings and a new concrete wall. The interior of the facility will be thoroughly inspected for the presence of lead, and any materials identified as containing lead will be addressed accordingly.

Because of this unusual finding, Cal Poly is currently inspecting the ASI Children's Center located on Campus Way.

Information regarding possible lead exposure and testing information can be found at the San Luis Obispo County Public Health Web site at <http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/health/prevention/childlead.htm> or by contacting Janice Babos, R.N., P.H.N. at 805-781-5558 or jbabos@co.slo.ca.us.

Please contact Stacia Momburg at 805-756-6260 to arrange for interviews with Cal Poly officials.

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