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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

## **California school district ban PFAS and other harmful chemicals from school floors**



**Woodland, CA.** Last night, the Woodland Joint Unified School Trustees unanimously adopted a new sustainable floor policy that bans PFAS, lead, 4-PC, PBDEs, phthalates, and other hazardous chemicals commonly found in school carpets.

Mothers in this town relate to the environmental thriller “Dark Waters,” starring Mark Ruffalo, now playing in their downtown movie theater. The film follows the real-life story of a tenacious corporate lawyer, Rob Bilott, who risked his career and family to seek justice for a West Virginia town poisoned by a Dupont factory. Bilott discovered that Dupont hid its own research that PFAS, the fluorinated chemicals used to make Teflon, can cause cancer and birth defects.

Made of chains of strong carbon-flourine bonds, PFAS are dubbed “forever chemicals” because the body can’t break them down. These persistent chemicals now contaminate the water systems of hundreds of millions of Americans. But, the largest source of exposure to PFAS may not be your tap, but under your feet. That’s because these same chemicals have been added to carpets for stain resistance.

In 2017, the Woodland school district installed new “Green Label” carpets in classrooms and at least a dozen children were sickened. Some of their parents organized the Woodland Coalition for Green Schools to press for broad environmental reforms in their schools. In 2018, WJUSD became one of the first school districts in the county to ban Round-up. The coalition also convinced the district to switch to integrated pest management, restart its defunct recycling program, adopt fragrance-free cleaning products, and ban air fresheners in the classroom.

Last night mothers celebrated after the school board unanimously passed the flooring policy. “Although trustees were initially skeptical that carpets could be dangerous,” says coalition founder and leader, Dr. Liza Grandia, “safe floors became a priority because we all know that children are ‘rugrats.’ They spend a lot of time touching and breathing close to the ground.

After we read disturbing reports in 2017 and 2018 showing that ‘green label’ carpet can contain dozens of hazardous ingredients, including PFAS, we had to take action as parents.”

The mothers, represented by Legal Services of Northern California, appealed with a William Act complaint to the California Department of Education and requested that the District replace the carpets in the affected classrooms.

Learning from this experience, the school district’s new sustainable flooring policy follows three core principles:

- (1) School districts can't trust the word of industry and should always consult third-party certifications,
- (2) Staff and parents must stay abreast of new research about possible harmful chemicals to children’s health; and
- (3) Budgets should take into account savings from the “total cost of ownership” of hard floors that last longer than carpet and are easier to maintain.

Reflecting on all these reforms, Superintendent Tom Pritchard remarked, “Just a few years ago, the idea of having a ‘green school’ would have generated a conversation about the color of a building. But at WJUSD, that’s changing.”

Bill Allayaud of the **Environmental Working Group** praised the Woodland policy saying, "Excellent work by the school board and committed, concerned citizens. Importantly, the new policy addresses the now ubiquitous Teflon-like chemicals that are being sold as ‘must have stain resistant’ components. This move is good for the children, the teachers, and certainly the workers who clean the classrooms.”

Added Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director of the **National Stewardship Action Council**, which has worked on carpet recycling since 2015, “We have learned about the toxics in carpet and other flooring products and are delighted the Woodland School District is putting the health of kids and employees first. We hope more schools and businesses follow the Woodland public schools’ lead in adopting sustainable floor policy to drive a cleaner and safer flooring industry.”

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**About the Woodland Coalition for Green Schools.** This grassroots organization formed in September 2017 to work for more environmentally healthier and sustainable schools. Our goals are threefold:

- (1) To remove environmental health hazards from classrooms, cafeterias, and campuses.
- (2) To reduce the district's ecological footprint and integrate sustainability principles throughout management.
- (3) To help form and educate the next generation of environmental citizens.

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