

## Play sand safety debate

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By Sandra Chapman, WTHR investigative reporter

INDIANAPOLIS You may have seen the warnings that a chemical in play sand is known to cause cancer. 13 Investigates saw it too, and wanted to know if allowing your children to scoop, shovel or build castles with it is safe.

Sand is one of the most natural forms of play on the beach or in a box.

"I figure I grew up in it, why can't they? I'm 38. I'm still here," said Jamie Horn, the father of a 12-year-old son.

But far away from the scoops and sand castles is a warning sure to dig up concern. Play sand "contains a chemical known to cause cancer."

"There's warnings on everything. Everything has a warning. Liability. Lawsuits. Whatever anybody can do to cover themselves," Horn said about the warning labels on play sand.

"I haven't seen the warning on the bags of sand. I think people need to be informed of any concerns," said Mary Lasich, as she enjoyed an afternoon of swimming with her grandchildren.

13 Investigates found it in clear view at garden centers across Central Indiana.

Inside a 10-pound bag of play sand is something the State of California says consumers should know about.

For \$3, we take a bag home and start asking questions about the potential danger from a chemical called [silica](#).

"It's found in pretty much all sand," said Dr. Brent Furbee, the Medical Director for the Indiana Poison Center.

"The crystal type is the type that causes cancer and it can cause silicosis which is a non-cancer lung disease," he explained.

Crystalline silica is a basic component of sand whether bought at the store, or hauled fresh from the gravel pit.

13 Investigates went to Brookfield Sand & Gravel and asked, "Is there any danger that you're aware of in this type of sand you're getting naturally from the ground?"

"Not that I'm aware of. The testing we've done is most for gradation and PH balance, but nothing to that nature with the warnings that I've heard about," responded Tony Zintsmaster, who is in charge of Quality control at the gravel pit.

Silica poisonings have long been associated with miners, sand-blasters and others, who breathe in large amounts of dust particles over 20 to 30 years.

In 1986, the state of California began requiring manufacturers to put warnings on products containing chemicals that cause cancer or birth defects, including silica.

Years later warnings on play sand started showing up.

But are children really at risk?

Dr. Furbee says no.

"We just don't see children for example develop silicosis and when we see it in adults, we usually can connect it with an occupational exposure," he said explaining his position of no perceived risk.

Between 2001 and 2008, the US Consumer Product Safety Commission noted in a study on playground equipment 18 reports of sand box poisonings. But officials can't say if it's from silica in play sand. There are still no linked cases of children developing cancer.

Despite the odds, parents are piling on at the website [safemamma.com](http://safemamma.com), seeking even safer alternatives.

"I have seen some people advertising their sand doesn't contain crystalline, crystal silica. I don't know how reliable those claims are," Dr. Furbee cautioned.

A simple childhood pleasure is now resulting in complex discussions.

"It's important for people to understand that this takes a long-term exposure. It's not a one-shot deal," emphasized Dr. Furbee.

"If something's been added to the sand, if it's not a natural product of the earth, I would want to know that, and then make an educated decision," said Lasich.

The data leaves parents and grandparents to decide whether to draw a line in the sand.

The Indiana Department of Health and the Department of Environmental Management both say Indiana does not monitor play sand and declined to talk about the package warnings.