

Additional Questions for the Record

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky

1. Football helmets, especially in youth and high school football, are often reconditioned, which involves cleaning of pads and hardware and the repair or replacement of parts as needed. Beginning in 2012, the National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) implemented a policy that it will not refurbish football helmets that are 10 or more years old. In announcing this policy, NAERA President Ed Fisher told the *New York Times*, “I would want my son, and anybody’s son, to be in a helmet less than 10 years old. We need to get the older ones off the field.”

a. As “football’s national governing body,” does USA Football require that teams replace all helmets 10 or more years old? Why or why not?

USA Football follows NAERA’s policy of replacing helmets within 10 years in its National Teams program. USA Football publicly reinforces to the high school and youth football community – our primary constituents – NAERA’s policy that 10-year-old football helmets shall not be reconditioned (through our website, usafootball.com). Moreover, USA Football provides high school and youth football programs with equipment grants to help them adhere to NAERA’s policy and replace helmets.

b. New football helmets can cost from \$100 to \$400 each. How often do youth football teams typically replace helmets with newer models?

The frequency for youth football teams to replace helmets varies greatly by league. USA Football does not operate or administer youth tackle football organizations, however, we provide information on best practices – including helmet replacement – as well as provide resources for leagues to meet these best practices wherever possible, including equipment grants.

c. Does USA Football require teams to have their helmets reconditioned on a regular basis? If so, how often must youth team helmets be reconditioned? If not, how often do youth football teams typically recondition their helmets?

Our organization does not operate or administer youth tackle football organizations. As such, USA Football is not in a position to require helmet reconditioning outside of its own National Team program.

For the U.S. National Team Program, USA Football adheres to guidelines set forth by helmet industry experts, which recommend helmets be reconditioned no less than every two years. USA Football promotes the guidelines to high school and youth programs and works to provide access to helmet reconditioning through equipment grants.

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To the best of our knowledge, research of a national scope has yet to be conducted concerning the frequency of youth football helmet reconditioning.

- 2. According to a report in the *New York Times*, football helmets more than 10 years old are worn by about 100,000 young players every season. In 2012, USA Football and the Consumer Product Safety Commission, partnered with a number of public and private entities on a pilot program to replace youth football helmets 10 years old or older in an effort to better protect the safety of young players.**

- a. Has the helmet replacement program continued past its initial 2012 pilot? If so, how many helmets have been replaced in each year since the partnership began in 2012? If not, why not?**

After the 2012 pilot, the program shifted from a replacement approach to a reconditioning approach. Rather than replacing 10-year-old and older helmets and leaving the remaining helmet inventory untouched, leagues applied for a grant to have some or all of their helmet inventory reconditioned. If any of the helmets submitted for reconditioning were more than 10 years old, the league received a voucher to replace the old helmets. This shift was made following the pilot year to allow more leagues to benefit from the program, to streamline program operations, and to improve the impact of the program. During the 2012 pilot program, 4,000 helmets were surrendered.

- b. What was the average age of the helmets that were replaced through the program?**

We do not have this data.

- c. When do you expect that we will eliminate all youth helmets over 10 years old?**

The pilot program led us to believe that there are leagues who recondition and refresh their inventories frequently, and those who recondition rarely or never. These often under-resourced leagues can be difficult to access, so education is key to reaching these leagues and persuading them of the value of appropriately maintaining their helmet inventory. USA Football promotes to the high school and youth football community that helmets older than 10 years are to be retired, per NAERA's recommendation.

- 3. I appreciate the steps USA Football has taken to address the safety of young athletes around the country as they learn how to play football. Football is one of the nation's most high-profile sports, and implementing best practices at the youth level is critical.**

In written testimony submitted for the Subcommittee hearing on March 13, 2014, you mentioned that not only has USA Football sought to teach young players how to play the game right, but also that your organization donated \$1 million last year for equipment and uniforms, based on need and merit.

- a. The safety of equipment is an important factor in player safety. What steps do you take to test the quality of the equipment that is donated by USA Football?**

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The grants awarded through USA Football's \$1 million football equipment grant program are vouchers to purchase new equipment. The recipient of the grant, not USA Football, selects the equipment purchased through the grant program.

We are expanding size of our equipment grant program from \$1 million to \$1.5 million in 2015 and may add helmet reconditioning as a grant option.

b. Is the donated equipment mostly new or reconditioned? For reconditioned equipment, how do you ensure that it is properly reconditioned?

USA Football awards vouchers. These vouchers may be used to purchase new equipment and may be used to recondition existing equipment.

c. What percent of the \$1 million in equipment donated last year was awarded based on need?

USA Football equipment grant program recipients all have a level of need. Through our independent funding of this program, we are able to financially fulfill more than 900 of the 2,000-plus applications that we received in 2014.

d. Data from 2010 indicates that 500,000 young football players, particularly in poorer communities, wore helmets that autumn which had not undergone basic reconditioning. I would think that your organization would be in a perfect position to alleviate this problem, which endangers the brain health of so many young football players in the country. In cases where new football helmets are not an option, what is USA Football capable of doing to get properly reconditioned helmets to these young football players, whose programs or school districts so often cannot afford the expense of reconditioning? Does your organization have concrete plans to expand its role in this area?

USA Football recently created a foundation that will focus on improving access to the sport. Assisting high schools and youth leagues in reconditioning helmets is a potential program for the USA Football Foundation.

4. A key component of USA Football's sports concussion efforts is its "Heads Up Tackling" initiative, which teaches young players tackling techniques intended to reduce the incidence of concussions. However, in a recent article on ESPN.com, investigative reporters Steve Fainaru and Mark Fainaru-Wada, authors of the book *League of Denial*, highlighted statements raised by critics questioning the usefulness of the program, including one from a former NFL player describing Heads Up as "a product that the NFL is selling" to "create the illusion that the game is safe or can be made safe."

a. Does USA Football monitor and record injury data for both its tackle and flag football programs?

To clarify, USA Football's Heads Up Football® program is our country's only youth and high school sport-specific player safety and coaching education program

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endorsed by multiple leading medical organizations as well as a sport's leaders on youth, high school, collegiate and professional levels. As you note, teaching young athletes safer and fundamentally sound tackling techniques is vitally important. However, Heads Up Tackling[®] is but one of several important components of Heads Up Football – a program created and administered by USA Football.

In addition, since its publishing of the Jan. 13, 2014, story about Heads Up Football, ESPN has become one of USA Football's most significant endorsers, providing generous financial and promotional support for our work. ESPN announced its financial support of USA Football (story can be found here:

<http://www.espnfrontrow.com/2014/10/espn-usa-football-team-advance-youth-player-safety/>) during its Oct. 27, 2014, *Monday Night Football* telecast. ESPN's financial gift to our nonprofit office will enable high schools spanning 28 states to enroll into our Heads Up Football program in 2015. We are proud to have ESPN's generous support and trust.

Relative to player safety research, USA Football in 2012 began commissioning an annual youth tackle football player safety surveillance study encompassing more than 4,000 young athletes across multiple states to gain knowledge about the level of safety at our sport's grassroots and leverages this science for the good of young athletes. This independent scientific study, conducted by the Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention, is believed to be the first of its scope in youth football's 80-plus year history.

b. How does the safety of tackle football compare with flag football for children under 14?

No scientific study for flag football paralleling our youth tackle football player safety surveillance study has been conducted to our knowledge. USA Football would welcome this research or grant funding that would enable our nonprofit office to expand the youth tackle football player safety surveillance study to investigate the rates of injury in flag football.

c. Has “Heads Up Tackling” reduced injuries among youth players? If so, please provide statistics and documentation supporting that conclusion. If not, please explain why not.

USA Football will have its initial year of data in the first quarter of 2015 that analyzes the level of safety in youth football organizations that participate in our Heads Up Football program versus those that do not.

d. In 2013, over 25% of youth leagues nationwide registered for your Heads Up Football program. Generally, why did nearly 75% of leagues not register, and how do you plan to increase the share of those who do?

Heads Up Football was first offered on a national scale to youth leagues in 2013. Reaching a registration figure of 25 percent in year one marked an encouraging and significant start in changing behavior for the better, particularly when considering that USA Football does not possess mandating authority with youth football

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organizations. Prior to 2013, there was no national coaching education and player safety program endorsed by leaders in medicine or sport for youth football organizations to employ nationwide. The programs and resources that we create and offer to the high school and youth football community are put into practice as a value proposition. In 2014, more than 50 percent of our nation's youth football leagues registered for Heads up Football as did more than 750 high schools across 44 states.

There is more work to be done and we are inspired to continue to do it in partnership with medical and sport experts through education-based outreach such as free events, public service announcements and educational campaigns. Our hope is that all high school and youth football programs participate in Heads Up Football for the good of their young athletes.

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