

June 10, 2005

Environmental Health and Indoor Air Quality at Seattle Public Schools

You may have seen or heard recent media coverage related to issues of mold and other environmental health matters at our schools.

The purpose of this message is to let your know, in the clearest possible terms, that Seattle Public Schools is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for staff and students, and to addressing any problems as quickly and responsibly as possible. We also want to provide you with the facts about these topics, and the actions we are taking to ensure any environmental risks are reduced through proactive management.

Student and staff health and safety is a top priority for the Superintendent, leadership team, and members of the school board. Resources have and will be allocated to respond to pressing health and safety needs.

Senior Leadership Wants to Hear About Unresolved Environmental Health Concerns. All members of staff, students and parents are encouraged to bring any concerns about environmental health issues (air quality, mold, water intrusion, etc.) to the attention of the school principal. In most cases, issues are dealt with promptly and concerns resolved. However, if staff or families remain concerned about the timeliness or adequacy of response, they are encouraged to contact the district's Risk Manager, Richard Staudt, at restaudt@seattleschools.org.

A District-wide Indoor Air Quality Survey is Nearly Complete. A comprehensive survey of all school buildings began in March and will be completed by the end of the school year. The survey process is managed by Richard Staudt and involves a room-by-room inspection of each school, measures of CO2 levels, and recording of any potential issues such as stained ceiling tiles, presence of moisture or mold, and other factors. Surveyors were instructed to be very thorough in their review. In cases where mold is "suspected," an Environmental Health Coordinator conducts a follow-up inspection. **To date 60 schools have been surveyed and the remainder are scheduled for completion by the end of the school year.** Surveyors requested follow-up inspections for mold at 20 sites. To date, an environmental coordinator has inspected 11 of the 20 buildings. The presence of mold was confirmed at *only two* of those sites, Washington Middle School and High Point Elementary.

- At Washington Middle School, a small amount of mold was detected in one portable and in a science materials storage closet. The mold was removed. Repairs will be made to the roof of the portable this summer.
- At High Point, a small amount of mold was found, and removed, from a classroom. In addition, an area of mold in the wall space near the front

door of the school has been sealed. Work will be done this summer to remove the mold and complete needed repairs.

- Identified separately, not through the survey, was a small amount of mold at Leschi Elementary, which has also been removed.

Other District-wide Initiatives related to Environmental Health. A series of protocols, including regular cleaning and inspection by custodians and a structured asbestos management plan, are in place. Other procedures being added include:

- Safety committees – additional training for school-based safety committees is planned. Additional items will be added to the checklist used by safety committees during quarterly walkthroughs.
- Nursing services checklist – a health questionnaire has been developed, with a view to tracking and early identification of clusters of student/staff symptoms that could potentially be triggered by environmental health issues. Risk management will provide training later this month.
- School-based task force approach – the “Indoor Air Quality Task Force” approach, described below as applied to Arbor Heights, will be utilized as appropriate for future situations. The task force includes senior-level district staff, environmental experts, parents and staff.
- The Facilities Director and Risk Manager are reviewing other systems and procedures to ensure that day-to-day requests related to health and safety issues are acted on promptly and effectively.

Mold Issues at Nathan Hale. Last fall, we shared information about water intrusion and mold issues at Nathan Hale. We sought advice and guidance from experts with Public Health – Seattle & King County, the Department of Labor and Industries, and Globaltox, an environmental consulting firm. Testing determined that airborne mold levels within the school were actually lower than outdoor mold levels. A small amount of mold was identified, sealed, and then removed over winter break. At that time, we committed to a project for summer 2005 where 1600 ceiling tiles will be removed and replaced. Gypsum board material will be inspected for mold and mold and damaged materials removed if found.

Water and Mold Issues at Arbor Heights. Staff and parents at Arbor Heights raised concerns about the potential health impacts of water pooling under modular classrooms. The district did not respond as quickly nor as effectively to this issue as needed, and we apologize to staff, students and families. Once the matter was brought to the attention of Richard Staudt, Risk Manager, and Fred Stephens, Facilities Director, we provided a prompt and comprehensive response. Some of the action steps taken and planned include:

- An Arbor Heights Indoor Air Quality Task Force, chaired by Mr. Stephens, meets weekly. The team, which includes two parents and two staff members from the school, plans, prioritizes and monitors action steps. The task force will continue to meet until it is certain that all water intrusion issues have been addressed.
- Experts from Public Health – Seattle & King County; the Department of Labor & Industries; and the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency have visited and inspected areas of concern at Arbor Heights. We are following all of their recommendations.
- The PTSA asked the district to fund a PTSA-selected independent consultant to advise parents about the situation at Arbor Heights. The consultant made several inspection visits, and we are awaiting his report.
- Mold and other air quality issues - To date, a small amount of mold was found, and removed, from a joist underneath a modular unit at the school. We have asked the PTSA consultant to let us know if he identifies other areas of mold. If so, they will be removed. One of a series of tests for fibers in the air revealed a relatively high fiber content, but these were not asbestos fibers.
- The PI story on June 8 stated that the district was waiting for the PTSA consultant's report before making any permanent fixes. This is not accurate. Actions taken include:
 - Pumped out water underneath the modular units – but the water has returned.
 - Fixed a domestic water line leak.
 - Fixed a heating water pipe leak and scheduled replacement of the system under four of the modular rooms for summer 2005.
 - Inspected downspouts and roof drains, identified four with leaks. Fixed three of those leaks, staff requested that the fourth be repaired after the last day of school.
 - Hired a hydrogeologist to recommend a permanent solution to the groundwater problem.
 - The task force will agree on additional actions that need to be taken pending receipt of reports by the PTSA consultant and the hydrogeologist.

I hope this helps address any questions or concerns you might have. If not, please let me know.

Mark Green
Chief Operating Officer