

# City inactive as kids learn at toxic sites

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Tuesday, April 22nd 2008, 4:00 AM



Fenced off area at IS 181 in Baychester marks toxic soil to be taken to hazardous waste dump. Soil had more than 50 parts per million of PCBs. Anything higher than 0.1 is contaminated.

Recent testing has uncovered alarming levels of cancer-linked PCBs in five [Bronx](#) schools, but the city has yet to remove the illegal contamination.

The Daily News reported two weeks ago that lab tests found PCBs - polychlorinated biphenyls - in the window caulking, soil or on surfaces at the local schools.

Public School 178 in [Baychester](#) had PCBs in its caulking more than 2,000 times the threshold to be considered toxic waste by the federal [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

PS 160 in Baychester and Intermediate School 131 in [Soundview](#) also showed illegal levels of contamination in their caulk.

The DOE claims that air tests at the schools did not show a high risk of PCB exposure from the hazardous materials and sees no urgency to remove them.

PCBs were routinely added to caulking to make it more flexible from the 1960s until they were banned as carcinogens in 1977.

But the DOE still says it sees no need to test for PCBs at more than 250 other schools built between 1960 and 1977 - more than 50 of them in the Bronx.

City tests prompted by The News reports also found alarming PCB levels in dust-wipe samples from PS 153 and in the soil of IS 181, both in Baychester.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation considers soil with PCBs higher than 0.1 parts per million to be contaminated. But the PCBs found in one sample from the north side of IS 181's schoolyard - more than 50 ppm - is so high the EPA considers the soil itself to be hazardous waste.

The DOE has fenced off the toxic deposit and plans to remove it to a hazardous waste dump.

The other main action the city has taken to protect Bronx students from the PCBs found in their schools was to give one room at PS 153 - room 179, where the city found high levels of PCBs in dust - an overnight cleaning.

In contrast, at PS 199 on [Manhattan's](#) upper West Side, where the city detected airborne PCBs in the cafeteria, the entire school was scrubbed top to bottom over the course of two days.

"Some of the parents don't feel like enough is being done here," said [Leslie Brewster](#), a parent of a second-grader at PS 178.

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## Schools test high for PCBs

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are man-made chemicals banned since 1977 after being linked to cancer and birth defects.

Prior to being outlawed, PCBs were routinely added to caulking to keep it flexible and used extensively in construction.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now considers any materials with PCB concentrations of 50 parts per million (ppm) or higher to be hazardous waste that must be immediately removed, imposing fines of \$3,000-\$25,000 per day until it's done.

The Daily News found illegal levels of contamination in the caulking at three Bronx schools, while city tests discovered a toxic waste deposit in the soil on the ground of a fourth. These were:

PS 178: 111,000 ppm (in caulking)

IS 131: 17,960 ppm (in caulking)

PS 160: 189 ppm (in caulking)

IS 181: 52 ppm (in soil)

A test for PCBs in dust at a fifth Bronx school, PS 153, found lower levels, triggering an emergency scrubbing of the room where it was found.