

Funding an issue as PCB remediation continues at Estabrook School

Courtesy photo

The Joseph Estabrook School is located at 117 Grove St. in Lexington.

**By Michael Phillis/Staff Writer**

**GateHouse News Service**

Posted Sep 29, 2010 @ 04:48 PM

**Recommend**

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Lexington —

Remediation efforts have successfully reduced levels of **polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)** in the air to below Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines in most classrooms at **Estabrook Elementary School**.

Designated by the EPA as a “probable human carcinogen,” PCBs were banned from production in 1979. The Estabrook School was constructed in 1961.

According to EPA guidelines, PCB levels must measure no higher than 300 nanograms per meter cubed (ng/m<sup>3</sup>) in classrooms for grades 1-6. The EPA guideline for kindergarten classrooms is 100 ng/m<sup>3</sup>.

The latest round of air testing showed PCB levels in all classrooms at Estabrook are currently below 200 ng/m<sup>3</sup>, but some kindergarten classrooms are still above the 100 ng/m<sup>3</sup> threshold. The highest measured air sample in a kindergarten room was 189 ng/m<sup>3</sup>, which is down significantly from initial tests in July that tested as high as 1,800 ng/m<sup>3</sup>.

At a School Committee meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 21, Lexington Public Schools Superintendent Paul Ash proposed a **four-phase plan to remediate PCBs at Estabrook**.

In phase one of his plan, Ash proposed replacing the ceiling tiles in the kindergarten portion of the school. Phase two involves convening a special Town Meeting in November to allocate funding for phase three, which would include replacing the ceiling tiles in the rest of the school — a project that could cost \$764,000.

The funding breakdown for remediation work thus far has consisted of about \$96,000 in allocations from annual Town Meeting and the initial public facilities operating budget, \$38,000 from the school budget, and about \$150,000 from the Appropriation Committee Reserve Fund approved on Aug. 23.

An additional \$250,000 for replacing ceiling tiles — found to have PCB levels many times higher than EPA guideline of 50 parts per million — was allocated from the reserve fund on Friday, Sept. 24, at a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Appropriation Committee and Capital Expenditures Committee.

This leaves a gap of more than \$200,000 between the approximately \$534,000 that has been allocated for remediation work and the approximately \$750,000 price tag for the project through the completion of phase one. That deficit is approximately equal to the debt taken on

by the Facilities Department operating budget.

It is likely that special Town Meeting will discuss how to reimburse the Facilities Department and replenish the Appropriation Committee Reserve Fund. In addition, Town Meeting will consider a further yet to be determined allocation for continuing remediation work at the school.

### **Change of plans**

Work on phase one of Ash's plan was delayed for a week after a member of the Appropriation Committee suggested a way to test the effectiveness of the planned remediation work.

"One of the members recalled last time we had met we had a plan to remove caulk and we were sure that was going to work. We found out it didn't work," said Director of Facilities Pat Goddard.

The Appropriation Committee member, according to Goddard, asked if it would be possible to test the district's plan by putting up plastic against the ceiling and running more air tests to see if replacing the contaminated ceiling tiles would fix the problem.

"The goal would be to be able to say definitely that the ceiling tiles are transmitting and infusing PCBs," said Ash.

Speaking at the joint committee meeting on Sept. 24, Hank Manz, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, proposed a three-part plan that was adapted to move forward.

The results of the first portion of phase one — air sampling while the ceiling tiles are covered in the kindergarten wing — will be analyzed to better understand the effectiveness of replacing the ceiling tiles.

According to Ash, if it is found proper to move forward with replacing the ceiling tiles, that work could be done the first weekend in October.

Manz also suggested waiting a week before looking to set a date for a special Town Meeting.

In addition, a task force was established to investigate EPA guidelines further and to analyze the effectiveness of future remediation efforts.

"This has grown into a town problem," Manz said.

Copyright 2010 Lexington Minuteman. Some rights reserved