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## ENVIRONMENT; This Crusader Tilts at PCB's

By BARBARA WHITAKER

DR. DANIEL LEFKOWITZ seems to have a knack for spotting potential environmental dangers and a willingness to make noise about them. If not for him, PCB contamination might never have been discovered at his 7-year-old son's school, French Hill Elementary.

But while he has been roundly praised for bringing the problem to light, some in the district see the doctor's vigilance as a decidedly mixed blessing. "When talking about something like PCB's," said Jay Miller, a school board member, "remediation and cleanup can be astronomically expensive."

Mr. Miller, who has expressed support for Dr. Lefkowitz but sees the issue as daunting, added, "I think people are frightened that the more you test, the more you're going to be told to remediate and the more it's going to cost."

Indeed at French Hill, the cost estimates for cleanup range from \$100,000 to \$400,000, depending on the amount of soil that is ultimately removed from around the building, said Thomas Cole, assistant superintendent for business and facilities. And Dr. Lefkowitz, who serves on the district's health and safety committee, is pressing for further testing of air and dust inside the school as well as analysis of caulk in pillars in front of the building, which would drive the cost even higher.

"Where do you draw the line?" said Patricia A. Harris, who until Tuesday served as board president of the Yorktown Central School District. "I'm told PCB's were used in baby ointments, in Vaseline, in a thousand products we used to use in our households. To decipher it all is not only beyond my job description, but beyond my capabilities."

Ms. Harris also knows that money is tight in the district, which has six schools and about 4,200 students, and that the \$73.2 million budget for next year is about \$740,000 lower than the amount originally sought -- which voters rejected.

The PCB quest began last fall when the doctor -- a podiatrist on disability because of nerve damage in a hand -- was combing the Internet for information about asbestos in Sheetrock before beginning a bathroom renovation.

He came across a Harvard study published last year that found that eight Boston buildings, some of them schools, had caulk with PCB levels above Federal guidelines. He knew that French Hill had been built in 1969, at a time when such caulk was being used, and that its windows had been replaced in 2003. So he checked on the ground and found caulking, which he had tested by a lab.

The caulk was found to contain more than 350 times the levels acceptable under federal guidelines. PCB's, or polychlorinated biphenyls, were banned in 1977 and have been linked to developmental problems in children. (Although the Environmental Protection Agency sets such guidelines, it does not mandate testing for the presence of PCB's.)

PCB's in caulk are not the only environmental cause Dr. Lefkowitz has pursued in his son's district. Since joining the health and safety committee, he has pushed for safer paints and cleaning solvents (the State Legislature voted this past session to mandate the use of "environmentally sensitive" cleaning products in schools) and also worked to raise awareness about electromagnetic fields.

"I just feel we've created a very dangerous world, and it's time for us to take responsibility," Dr. Lefkowitz said. "I want to protect the children."

On the PCB issue, Dr. Lefkowitz says, it has been difficult to persuade officials to take the problem seriously. He complained that some affected areas at the school have not been thoroughly isolated.

Dennis Verboys, director of facilities and operations for the district, counters that the district has done what is necessary to protect the public health and was working with a consultant to eliminate the problem.

"I think we are going above and beyond," Mr. Verboys said, "but we're kind of at the forefront here."

Dr. Lefkowitz says he simply wants to do the right thing, and that the more he looks, the more he finds. And he believes that without persistent pressure, the matter would not be dealt with.

To that end he has created a Web site, [pcbinschools.org](http://pcbinschools.org), to help raise awareness about the issue and is working with the Citizens' Environmental Coalition, based in Albany, to push legislators to finance projects to test, particularly in schools.

"I want this to come to the forefront," Dr. Lefkowitz said. "If I can get a pilot program going in New York State, then hopefully other state governments will follow."

But based on reactions at French Hill, gaining mass public support may prove challenging. "Mr. Lefkowitz is a great man," said Marissa Farda, a parent at the school and president of Foundation for Excellence, a district fund-raising organization. "If that's what he believes, he has to keep pushing."

"But do I find it one of our major problems in the district? No."

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