

# Probe urged after News finds toxin in school buildings

BY KERRY BURKE AND BILL EGBERT  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, April 8th 2008, 9:05 AM



Councilman James Gennaro holds Monday's Daily News outside PS 86 in Jamaica, Queens, as he calls for PCB checks.

Politicians, parents and teachers demanded an immediate response Monday to the Daily News' revelation that toxins lurk in the caulking at dozens of city schools.

One City Council member demanded an inspection of every affected school, while another promised to hold hearings on the city's response to the presence of PCB-laced caulking in window and door frames in 266 schools citywide.

Polychlorinated biphenyls, which have been linked to lower IQ, asthma and cancer, were common in caulking used in the 1960s and '70s.

The News tested nine city schools built then and found traces of PCBs in eight. Six contained PCB levels well above what federal regulators deem acceptable. City schools could be hit with hefty fines for not removing the material.

In response to The News' inquiry, a city-hired consultant obtained air and swipe samples from the eight schools. All but one, [Public School 199](#) on the upper West Side, tested negative for PCBs in the air and areas surrounding the caulking.

The consultant found low levels of PCBs in air samples and dust swipes in the school's first-floor cafeteria.

Over the weekend, emergency cleanup crews wiped down the entire school.

Teachers and angry parents confronted school officials at a hastily called meeting at PS 199 and questioned how reassured they should be by the city's recent air and dust-swab tests.

They said the tests were done weeks after renovation work caused a chronic dust problem in many parts of the school.

"We would have to wipe down our classrooms once, maybe twice a day, every day for 10 days," said [Debbie Jones](#), a teacher for 17 years at the Center School, which is housed in the same building as PS 199. "And it wasn't just the teachers - the children helped, too."

Earlier, some parents expressed outrage as they picked up their children at the school.

"I'm alarmed," said [Tawana Bracey](#), 33, mother of a 6-year-old first-grader.

"I'm taking my daughter to the doctor now. I have to get her checked out. This school should take care of this."

"They are endangering our kids," said [Willis Ifill](#), 38, the father of two boys at PS 199.

At a news conference called yesterday in response to The News' findings, [Deputy Health Commissioner Jessica Leighton](#) assured parents their children were safe.

"At the levels that we found, there is not an exposure risk to children that we are concerned about," Leighton said. "We estimate that a child would have to be in their lunchroom for a number of months to get the exposure they would in eating one hamburger."

Food can be a major source of human PCB exposure.

[Randi Weingarten](#), president of the [United Federation of Teachers](#), called for a "coordinated" response, starting by checking the condition of caulking at all city schools built before 1980.

[Councilman James Gennaro \(D-Queens\)](#), standing outside PS86 in [Jamaica, Queens](#), where News tests found PCBs in the caulking, called for an immediate inspection of all city schools suspected of containing PCB caulking.

Another Council member, [Eric Gioia \(D-Queens\)](#), promised to hold hearings on the problem. Reps. [José Serrano \(D-West Bronx\)](#) and [Joseph Crowley \(D-East Bronx, Queens\)](#) announced Monday they were crafting legislation for a national PCB-caulking cleanup for schools, housing and hospitals.

[kburke@nydailynews.com](mailto:kburke@nydailynews.com)