

LEXINGTON

[Traces of PCBs in town buildings](#)

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**By Sara Brown, Town Correspondent**

Recent tests have revealed high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls, a potentially dangerous chemical known as PCBs, in some town buildings, including Estabrook Elementary School and Jonas Clarke Middle School. However, town officials say that the discovery does not pose any danger to children or employees.

An update from the Board of Health notes that buildings built between 1950 and 1978 may contain window caulking and other materials made with PCBs, a substance that was banned from use in the late 1970s.

Last September, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that some buildings built within that time period may contain the substance, which can be harmful if one is exposed to it for a long period of time.

Gerard Cody, Lexington's Health Director, said the town was proactive in testing buildings for PCBs, with the facilities department gathering samples from buildings and sharing the results with the Board of Health.

According to a Board of Health press release, an analysis of outdoor caulk samples at the Town Office Building, Clarke Middle School and Estabrook Elementary School showed that PCBs were "in excess of the federal limit for remediation."

David Deegan, a spokesman for the New England EPA office, said that other schools have had issues with PCBs in their exterior caulking. Sometimes, he said, soil under the windows is found to have an increased amount of the chemical, which can be dangerous if children have

direct contact with the substance.

Deegan said he wasn't aware of the issue with the Lexington schools.

According to the EPA website, people in buildings with PCBs could be exposed to the chemical through inhaling contaminated air or coming into contact or ingesting contaminated dust and soil.

PCBs have been demonstrated to cause cancer, as well as having adverse effects on the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system, and endocrine system. Effects depend on the frequency, duration, and concentration of the PCBs.

"Preliminary air sampling for PCBs in the indoor air of three buildings represents no public health hazard for workers," Cody said in a statement. "The levels were all below the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's workplace standards for a 40 hour work-week."

Cody said that in Lexington, there is no threat to students or teachers. More testing to get accurate results will take place, he said, and the town will continue to monitor and address any problems.

The Department of Public Facilities has budgeted funds for repairing and removing caulking over the summer, the press release said, and the caulk at Estabrook and the town offices will be monitored "for chipping and degradation."

"This is not just a Lexington issue," Cody said, pointing out that any building built in the time frame when PCBs were used could be affected. He compared the issue to the discovery of asbestos in buildings, with PCBs the "new asbestos."

"This is new for us to grapple with," Cody said.