

Tests reveal high PCB levels at French Hill school

by Martin Wilbur

Tests conducted at Yorktown's French Hill Elementary School this summer have revealed high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) in several locations, prompting district officials to take measures to rid the building of the carcinogenic.

The district will now work with their consultant to do the necessary remediation on outdoor columns in front of the building and on expansion joints inside the school to a height of six feet above the ground, said Thomas Cole, assistant superintendent for business.

An outdoor courtyard has also been found to have the substance but access to that area is limited for emergency use only.

Despite the presence of PCBs in those locations, there are no friable pieces that will pose an immediate danger to the school's inhabitants, officials said.

Cole mentioned the district will follow state Department of Education (SED) protocol to deal with handling the PCBs.

The outdoor columns in front of the building will be cordoned off.

While attention has focused on French Hill the past year, there is a likelihood most or all of the district's schools, which were built in the 1950s and 60s.

Caulking was typically used in schools and other public building constructed from the 1950s until it was outlawed in 1977.

"The chance that this kind of caulk exists in every (school) building is very high," said Cole. "It's industrial caulking, it's high grade and is probably in every building in town of that era."

However, trustees called for calm, and asked for community members' input to address how the district should handle the matter in the other schools.

Trustee Patricia Harris said it was time "to have a communitywide discussion to see

how we are going to remediate this issue districtwide."

The PCB issue came to light earlier this year after French Hill parent Dan Lefkowitz, a former member of the district's Safety Committee founding caulking outside near the building, about one year after the school's original windows were replaced.

Earlier this summer, work was completed to deal with the contaminated soil

around building.

Lefkowitz said he was happy officials this week talked about getting the community involved but gave the district low marks for taking too much time to take action.

Knowing the likelihood of the existence of PCBs on French Hill's grounds, there should have been swifter action, rather than some resistance, to conduct tests,

Lefkowitz stated.

"They didn't practice prudent measures and they should have done it," said Lefkowitz who urged the district to press local political leaders to fight for funding to help school systems like Yorktown with funding for remediation.

Cole's rough estimates for French Hill remediation would cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000.