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## SUNY Campus Delays Opening Over PCB Fears

By LISA W. FODERARO,  
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**NEW PALTZ, N.Y., Jan. 6**— Officials of the State University here announced today that they would delay the spring semester by two weeks and move 1,000 students out of dormitories after electrical transformers exploded or overheated last week, contaminating five buildings with PCB's.

Three dormitories and two academic buildings were contaminated after a car struck a utility pole on Dec. 29, causing a power surge that damaged the transformers. In the transformer room of one academic building, the level of PCB's was 3,200 times the level considered safe under state guidelines, although some samples revealed no contamination in parts of the affected buildings. **Concern From Students**

Twenty-two people, including seven students, were exposed to smoke-borne polychlorinated biphenyl particles. They were treated at local hospitals and released.

Although PCB's are known to cause cancer in animals, studies thus far have not proved a definitive link between PCB's and cancer in humans. But concern over the carcinogenic effect of the compounds caused officials to shut down a state office building in Binghamton after a transformer fire there released PCB's in 1981, and as recently as 1990, unacceptable levels of PCB's were found in the structure.

Officials at SUNY-New Paltz said they planned to close the three contaminated dormitories, as well as a fourth dorm where a cloud of smoke was seen after the transformer explosion. The students who lived in those dorms will triple up in other dormitories or be placed in apartments or mobile units. The possessions in their rooms may be contaminated, in which case they might have to be abandoned, officials said today.

"The personal loss is tremendous," said Jamie Kleinkauf, a resident assistant in Bliss Hall, who said she had \$5,000 worth of clothing, jewelry and other items in her room. "I can buy another refrigerator, but I can't buy the poems I lost or the pictures of friends."

The accident occurred while the campus was virtually shut down for two weeks between semesters, with only SUNY employees and a small number of students left on campus. Ordinarily, there are 8,000 students at the four-year liberal arts college, about 90 miles north of New York City in the Hudson Valley.

"If it was going to happen, we couldn't have been more pleased that it happened when it did," said Karen L. Summerlin, a college spokeswoman.

At a news conference today, representatives of an environmental consulting company retained by the state to oversee testing and cleanup work said there is "indeed contamination, but it is not a high magnitude, and it is contained."

But the representative, William J. Geary, vice president of Clean Harbors Inc. of Quincy,

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Mass., could not say how long it would take to reopen the five campus buildings. The cleanup, he said, could take weeks, possibly months.

Extensive testing for PCB contamination is under way, and preliminary results from "wipe" tests on surfaces as well as air samples will be ready on Thursday. Science Building Affected

So far, the highest level of PCB's have been detected in the Coykendall Science Building, where tests showed residue of the carcinogen in some places to be 3,200 times the level considered safe under state guidelines.

The state has already signed 12 contracts worth a maximum of \$40,000 each with companies that will be involved in the decontamination process. When the State Office Building in Binghamton was contaminated with PCB's, the state spent \$35 million on the cleanup.

It was unclear whether the transformers should have withstood the blow to the utility pole. The college has 50 transformers on campus, and PCB's are in the oil that cools 20 of those. A routine inspection by the college in September found all transformers working properly.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency is conducting an investigation here but had not been given access to the contaminated areas. Federal law requires transformers containing PCB's to be clearly marked, registered with local fire companies and to include protective devices to limit electrical current.

"We don't have any information as to whether those transformers were adequately protected," said Mary M. Breitenbach, a spokeswoman for the E.P.A. in New York City.

#### Break to Be Canceled

College officials acknowledged on Thursday that they did not alert the Coast Guard National Response Center of the contamination within 24 hours, as required by law.

The college said it would make up for the two-week delay in the spring semester by doing away with spring break and, if necessary, extending classes at the end of the semester. Classes were to begin Jan. 21 but will be postponed until Feb. 3.

Half the 990 displaced students will be "tripled" in dorm rooms designed for two students. The rest will probably be placed in mobile units on campus and in apartments in town.

An eerie calm hung over the campus today where orange police barricades closed off entrances to most campus buildings.

Mat Dunphy, a junior from Rochester majoring in fine arts, was one of the seven students exposed during the transformer failures. He lives off campus but was visiting a friend in a dormitory a week ago Sunday when someone banged on the door and told them to evacuate the building. Worried About Exposure

Rollerskating across campus today, Mr. Dunphy said he felt fine but was unsure about the long-term consequences of his exposure. "I'm going to get a blood test today," he said, adding that the hospital took only his pulse and temperature and had him scrub down in the shower.

Dr. Nancy K. Kim, director of the Division of Environmental Health Assessment of the New York State Department of Health, said at a news conference said that a "one-time exposure" such as this "should not be a real concern in terms of chronic health effects."

Dr. Kim also said that residents of New Paltz, a town of 7,000 people, should not be concerned about contamination off campus.

Many students had complained that their personal belongings -- stereos, clothes, books -- are in limbo. Mr. Geary of Clean Harbors gave few reassurances today, declining to say when those items could be retrieved or even whether they could be decontaminated.

Covered by Insurance



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Irving H. Freedman, vice chancellor for capital facilities for the State University, said students' belongings should be covered by an insurance policy held by the State Dormitory Authority.

Ms. Kleinkauf, a senior from Guilford, Conn., said she was prepared to sue the college to recover the costs of her possessions.

A major concern among faculty members is the status of research projects in the science building. "We must see how much of that activity can be reclaimed," said William W. Vasse, the college's vice president for academic affairs.

Photo: Members of an environmental response team cleaning Gage Hall, one of the five buildings at the State University of New York at New Paltz that were contaminated with high levels of PCB's after electrical transformers exploded or overheated last week. (Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times) (pg. B7) Maps of the State University of New York at New Paltz campus highlighting PCB contaminated buildings.; New Paltz highlighting where the car accident occurred.; Albany showing the location of New Paltz. (pg. B7)

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