

Press Release

Region 2 - New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



EPA Announces Agreement with the City of New York On PCBs in School Caulk

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(New York, N.Y. – Jan. 19, 2010) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced an agreement with the City of New York to address the risks posed by PCBs in caulk found in some city schools. The agreement is intended to result in a city-wide approach to assessing and reducing potential exposures to PCBs in caulk in schools.

“The work that the City of New York has agreed to do will go a long way toward helping us better understand the potential risks posed by PCBs in caulk, and our work to reduce the exposure of school children, teachers and others who work in New York City public schools,” said Judith Enck, EPA Regional Administrator. “New York City’s 1,600 public schools make it the largest school system in the nation, and we believe that the program outlined in this agreement, along with general EPA guidance on managing the issue, will serve as a model for school systems across the country.”

The agreement announced today requires the city to conduct a study in five schools to determine the most effective strategies for assessing and reducing potential exposures to PCBs in caulk. The city will then produce a proposed plan for any cleanups needed in the five schools and use this information to develop a recommended city-wide approach. EPA is also requiring the city to develop and submit for approval best management practices for reducing exposure to PCBs in caulk in school buildings. These may include cleaning the schools, improving ventilation, and addressing deteriorating caulk.

Although Congress banned the manufacture and most uses of PCBs in 1976 and they were phased out in 1978, there is evidence that many buildings across the country constructed or renovated from 1950 to 1978 may have PCBs at high levels in the caulk around windows and door frames, between masonry

columns and in other masonry building materials. Exposure to these PCBs may occur as a result of their release from the caulk into the air, dust, surrounding surfaces and soil, and through direct contact. In September 2009, EPA provided new guidance to communities and announced additional research to address PCBs that may be found in the caulk in many older buildings, including schools. Today's agreement complements EPA's national efforts by helping building owners and managers facing serious PCB problems develop practical approaches to reduce exposures and prioritize the removal of PCB caulk.

The legally binding agreement announced today settles potential violations of the Toxic Substances Control Act by the city for having caulk that contains PCBs above allowable levels in some schools. As part of the study of the five yet to be determined schools, the city will sample extensively in them, and will ensure that any PCB waste is properly removed. Once the study is concluded the city will work with EPA to develop and implement a plan to identify, prioritize, and address the presence of PCBs within the New York City school system. In addition, the agreement calls for the development of a citizens' participation plan to ensure that school administrators, parents, teachers, students, and members of the public are kept fully informed throughout the process.

PCBs are man-made chemicals that persist in the environment and were widely used in construction materials and electrical products prior to 1978. PCBs can affect the immune, reproductive, nervous and endocrine systems and are potentially cancer-causing if they build up in the body over long periods of time. The greatest risks from PCBs involve sustained long-term exposure to high levels of PCBs.

EPA is currently conducting research to better understand the relationship between PCBs in caulk and PCB concentrations in caulk, air and dust. The Agency is doing research to determine the sources and levels of PCBs in buildings in the U.S. and to evaluate different strategies to reduce exposures.

More information can be found at www.epa.gov/pcbsincaulk.

Anyone seeking technical guidance should contact the EPA at: 1-888-835-5372.

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