



Sen. Murphy Urges EPA to Help Schools Combat Toxic PCBs

By [DAVID DESROCHES \(/PEOPLE/DAVID-DESROCHES\)](#) • NOV 6, 2015

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(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/styles/x_large/public/201411/Chris_Murphy.jpg)

Sen. Chris Murphy in a WNPR file photo.

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**“The level of toxic chemicals
found in schools across
Connecticut is deeply
troubling.”**

Sen. Murphy





A U.S. senator from Connecticut is calling for more oversight of managing toxic polychlorinated biphenyls in public schools.

Democrat Chris Murphy announced on Friday that he wants the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to help communities figure out what to do about PCBs, which could be present in any school built or renovated between 1950 and 1979. A WNPR investigation (<http://wnpr.org/post/why-so-many-schools-connecticut-probably-have-toxic-pcbs-aren-t-being-tested#stream/0>) found that two-thirds of Connecticut schools fit this profile and could be contaminated.

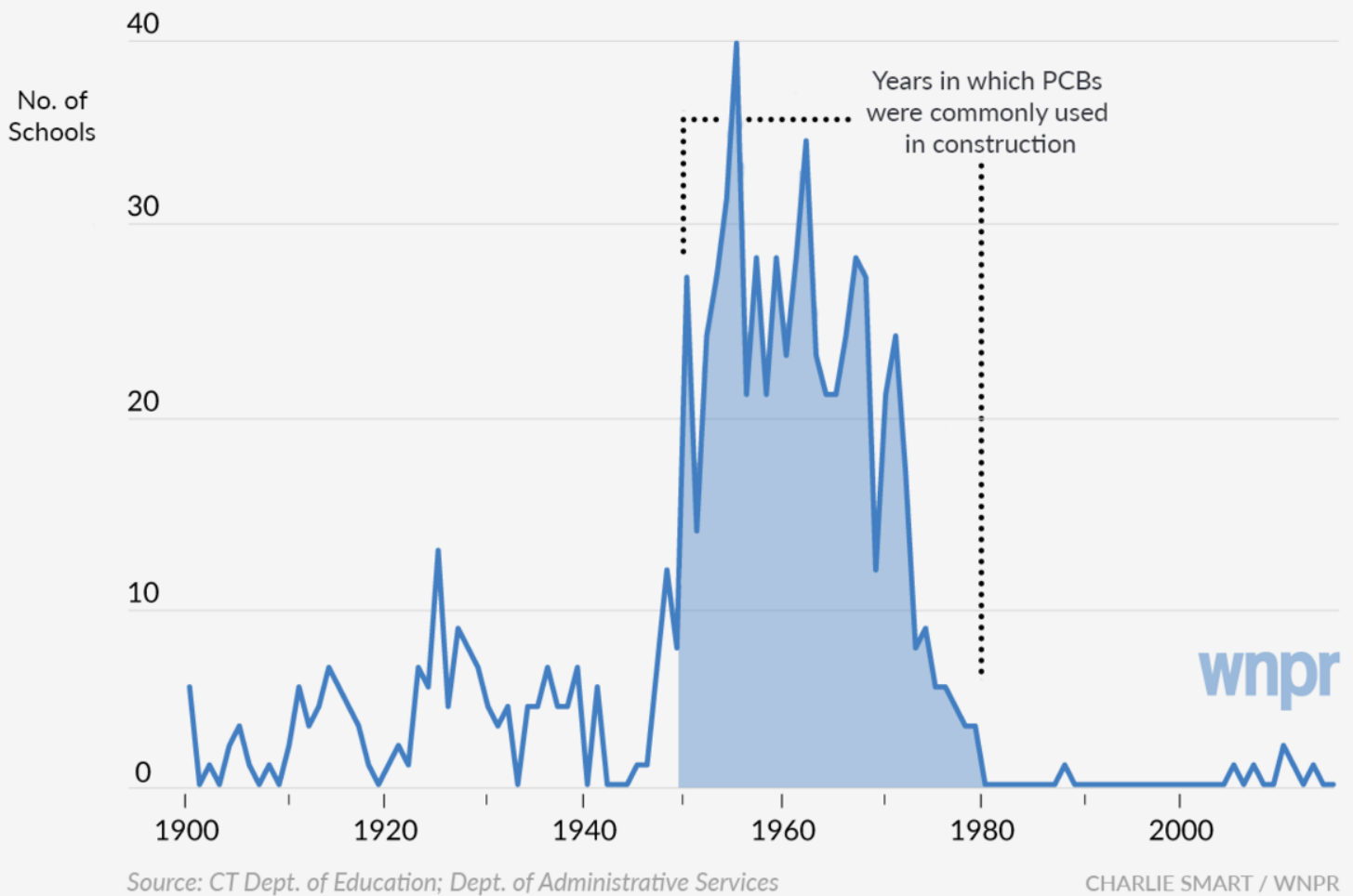
"The level of toxic chemicals found in schools across Connecticut is deeply troubling, and the full extent of PCB prevalence in Connecticut schools is still unknown," Murphy said in a statement. "The burden of both the fact-finding and the mitigation efforts falls heavily on local schools and communities."

In a letter to Gina McCarthy (http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/chris_murphy_letter_to_epa.pdf), EPA's administrator, Murphy cites documented cases in Connecticut towns and cities, and asks McCarthy for the EPA to ease the burden on districts that are charged with testing, finding, and paying for often expensive remediation.

"There are many schools across Connecticut that are undergoing renovations and could encounter PCBs as a result of these renovations," Murphy told McCarthy. "It is my position that the federal government should encourage school construction projects, and PCBs often make such construction cost prohibitive — at the expense of the children those schools serve."

Number of Schools Built in Connecticut by Year

A majority of schools in the state were built between 1950 and 1979 when PCBs were commonly used in construction.



http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/styles/x_large/public/201508/SchoolBuildingPlot

PCBs were banned in 1979 by the Toxic Substances Control Act. However, the regulations created by the EPA to manage PCBs do not require schools to test for the substance, which is known to cause an assortment of health problems. Research has begun to connect airborne PCBs to ailments such as thyroid and lung cancer

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/201509/385._volatile_pcbs.pdf) diabetes

(<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/1104247/>), hypertension

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/201508/385._volatile_pcbs.pdf), ADHD

(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/ehp-118-1654.pdf>), and reduced cognitive development

(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/NewmanNEUTOX2009congeners.pdf>) among children, according to research by the Institute for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

PCBs were widely used in construction materials, such as window caulk and adhesives, before being banned. The manmade chemical

Murphy said he worries that

can stay in the environment for years, sometimes decades, before breaking down. The international community has labeled it one of the 12 worst chemicals in the world, known as the "dirty dozen."

affluent schools will be able to get rid of PCBs, but poor districts will remain contaminated.

(<http://chm.pops.int/TheConvention/ThePOPs/The12InitialPOPs/tabid/296/Default.aspx>)

The City of Hartford and its school district recently filed suit against Monsanto (<http://wnpr.org/post/hartford-city-school-board-sue-monsanto-over-school-pcbstream/0>), which was the sole manufacturer of PCBs in the United States. The suit claims Monsanto should pay for the cleanup of Hartford's Clark School, which was closed last year due to extensive PCB contamination.

Two other similar suits are pending in Massachusetts, and a third recently ended in Monsanto's favor (<http://www.law360.com/articles/706538/pharmacia-beats-mass-school-s-pcb-contamination-suit>). The judge ruled that the company spun off from Monsanto, Solutia, couldn't have been aware in 1961 that PCBs in window caulking could have been toxic.



(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wnpr/files/styles/x_large/public/201509/clark_school_pcbstream)

Hartford's Clark School, closed after PCBs were discovered in the building last December. The toxic materials were found in new ceiling tiles.

Speaking with WNPR, Murphy said he worries that the more affluent schools will be able to get rid of PCBs, whereas the poor districts will remain contaminated.

"We're having a debate over reforming the nation's toxic substances law because there is a bipartisan lack of faith that the EPA, right now, is as serious as it should be about reviewing chemicals, whether it be PCBs or other chemicals," Murphy said.

The House and the Senate are discussing two separate TSCA overhaul bills that would require EPA to test chemicals, though there are no proposed changes in how it manages PCBs. The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/697/all-info>) is the version put forth in the Senate. The House's bill is called the TSCA Modernization Act. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2576>)

EPA officials have not responded to an emailed request for comment sent Friday.

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