

# Report: Contaminated Caulk At Hartford School Well Above Federal Limit

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**H**ARTFORD — Caulk used in the construction of Clark Elementary School is laden with PCBs and may be a reason why the school's air is tainted with the hazardous chemical, the district's consultants said in a report Friday.

Samples taken from the public school revealed PCB levels up to 1,940 times the federal limit, complicating Hartford's efforts to clear the contamination.

Eagle Environmental, a Plymouth firm, said the January tests were part of an initial review for the district so Hartford can begin a plan "to restore indoor air quality to acceptable limits." But the results, like a range of clues, confirmed that PCBs are so pervasive in the building that consultants cannot yet pinpoint the exact source polluting the air.

Clark's paint, fireproofing and air filters were found to contain polychlorinated biphenyls. Even new ceiling tiles installed last summer were contaminated — suggesting that PCB vapors had infiltrated the tiles.

The caulk may be a factor in the indoor air quality, the report stated. Eagle Environmental also raised the possibility that renovation work in summer 2014 could have disturbed materials that contain PCBs, but said any impact on the air "cannot be determined."

Superintendent **Beth Schiavino-Narvaez** said the Hartford school board will gather for a special meeting Tuesday to consider authorizing her proposal for a remediation plan. Narvaez would then submit the project to the city's school building committee for action.

The district estimates that it has spent about \$40,000 so far on PCB testing at Clark, a prekindergarten to grade 8 neighborhood school. About 350 Clark students were moved to three other city schools in mid-January after the toxic chemicals — known carcinogens that are a risk factor for a host of other long-term health effects — were found as workers prepared to install a fire sprinkler system.

Tests revealed airborne PCB levels above federal public health guidelines for schoolchildren. School administrators say the Clark cleanup could take a year.

"The remediation process will include the state and federal agencies with regulatory oversight for such projects," Narvaez said in a statement Friday. "This process has not been easy for our school community. My top priority continues to be to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for our students, staff and our families."

Clark's 104,000-square-foot school building was constructed in 1971, a time when PCBs were used in caulk and other commercial products before the U.S. banned production of the chemicals later that decade. The Environmental Protection Agency, which has advised Hartford on Clark, has warned that schools built between 1950 and 1979 could

have PCBs.

And when caulk and other building materials are found to have PCB concentrations exceeding 50 parts per million, that triggers strict rules under the federal Toxic Substances Control Act. The EPA requires special cleanup and disposal of the hazardous waste.

At Clark, the PCBs in the window caulk ranged from 41,000 parts per million in the principal's office to 97,000 ppm in Room 223. Caulk in the school entrance door frame tested at 79,000 ppm.

Robert Herrick, a senior lecturer in the environmental health department at Harvard's School of Public Health, said such high levels are not uncommon when PCBs are found in caulk.

"When you have levels that are that high in the caulk, it wouldn't be surprising at all that you have correspondingly high air levels, too," Herrick, who has studied PCB contamination in schools and public buildings, said Friday.

Eagle Environmental's report said PCBs were found in Clark's air filters and in spray-applied fireproofing, which is near the school's air handling system. In those areas, the PCB levels were below the federal limit, but exceeded the state's regulations and will need to be remediated.

The Clark contamination appears to be the most extensive case of PCBs detected in a Hartford school to date.

Records from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, which has identified more than 100 school buildings statewide that have reported PCB issues, show that Hartford's Simpson-Waverly School, Global Communications Academy, M.D. Fox, Bellizzi, the former Barbour School and West Middle School needed some form of PCB remediation in recent years.

PCB samples were taken as school renovations got underway. For state-reimbursed projects, districts are now required to test for hazardous materials in areas of the building that will be worked on.

At Simpson-Waverly, where Clark students in a special-education program have been relocated, it was a 2012 window replacement project that turned up low concentrations of PCBs in window glazing, records show.

The district indicated Friday that Simpson-Waverly's PCB testing was limited to the window area.

Massive overhauls at M.D. Fox and the former Quirk Middle School, now the home of Global Communications, uncovered caulk in 2011 with PCB levels above the federal limit. The cleanup and disposal plans for both schools required EPA approval.

That same year, minor PCB remediation was planned for Bellizzi in the city's South End and the 1950 section of the Barbour School building across town, state records show. That Barbour section was demolished as part of the \$37.45 million project to create the new Journalism and Media Academy.

And in 2013, as West Middle was being prepped for demolition work and its ongoing renovation, an inspection found PCB levels exceeding state regulations in the paint, flooring and other areas, according to a notice received by DEEP.

Andrea Johnson, president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, said Friday that she had not been informed of past PCB remediation in other city schools. With the Clark case alone, she said, there is "great concern" among teachers about potential health hazards.

State public health officials have tried to assure school employees and parents that the elevated PCB levels in Clark's air do not pose a health risk, although that assessment has drawn skepticism.

Johnson called on the district to proactively test other Hartford schools.

"Everybody's life is important," she said. "If there's something in there that's going to be hazardous to anybody, it needs to be taken care of."

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