

The Record

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Chemical fears shut 2 classrooms

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By MICHAEL GARTLAND
STAFF WRITER

HACKENSACK -- Hackensack High School has closed two classrooms due to concerns over chemicals in laboratory storage areas, school officials said Wednesday.

District administrators said there is no evidence to indicate a chemical spill occurred and that the closures are precautionary, stemming from routine cleanups.

Principal Mark Porto said teachers became worried when they learned that mercury was being stored in the building.

"There have been concerns among staff members who felt maybe these chemicals were the reason why they were sick," he said. "There was no spill. There was nothing that prompted this except inventorying the chem labs."

The district has hired an environmental engineering firm to inspect two classrooms and remove chemicals no longer used in laboratory exercises. Superintendent Joseph Montesano said the firm, the East Brunswick-based Whitman Co., is expected to report the results on Monday.

"Just as a precaution, we did take the kids out of those rooms," he said. The rooms in question are Room 426 and the room below it.

Parents with children at the high school learned about the cleanup Tuesday night at a school board meeting. Letters alerting parents were mailed Wednesday.

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School Asbestos Violations

From: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Weekly Digest Bulletin 10/05/02008, *Compliance and Enforcement News Release (Region 9): EPA fines six Arizona charter school operators for asbestos violations*, released September 30, 2008

EPA fines six Arizona charter school operators for asbestos violations
Schools failed to have inspections completed and asbestos management plans

SAN FRANCISCO -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently fined six Arizona charter school operators a combined total of \$11,600 for Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act violations.

In April 2007, EPA inspectors discovered that all but one of the school operators failed to conduct inspections to determine if asbestos-containing material was present in school buildings and all had failed to develop asbestos management plans. The schools have since completed inspections or otherwise obtained the appropriate documentation to establish that no asbestos-containing material is present in their school buildings. All of the schools have developed asbestos management plans.

“All schools, including charter schools, need to conduct asbestos inspections and have asbestos management plans,” said Katherine Taylor, associate director for the Communities and Ecosystems Division in EPA’s Pacific Southwest region. “Asbestos in schools has the potential for endangering the health of students, teachers, and others, including maintenance workers...”

Federal law requires schools to conduct an initial inspection using accredited inspectors to determine if asbestos-containing building material is present and develop a management plan to address the asbestos materials found in the school buildings. In certain circumstances, an inspection is not required if the school has a signed statement from the architect or builder stating that a new building was constructed with no asbestos-containing materials...

For (more) on asbestos in schools visit: http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/asbestos_in_schools.html

Oil Spills at Public Schools

From: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Weekly Digest Bulletin 12/16/2007, *Compliance and Enforcement News Release (Region 1): Rhode Island Schools Notified about Oil Spill Risks and Proper Prevention Techniques*, released December 12, 2007

(Boston, Mass. – Dec. 12, 2007) - Recent oil spills occurring at schools have prompted EPA's New England regional office to alert school officials in every city and town in Rhode Island to the risks posed by improper oil storage and the potential for oil spill accidents from school heating and oil storage systems...

...Over the last several years there have been several highly publicized fuel oil spill incidents at public schools across New England. These incidents have resulted in the release of thousands of gallons of fuel oil into rivers, lakes and streams, resulting in damage to the environment, costly cleanups, and civil penalties for the affected school districts...

...The federal Clean Water Act requires facilities that store over certain threshold amounts of oil to have spill prevention plans and adequate secondary containment at their storage tanks. States also have specific requirements pertaining to underground storage tanks.

EPA is committed to providing follow-up information that will broadly discuss environmental issues affecting schools in New England, including regulatory requirements and best practices and recommendations. To aid schools in identifying potential areas of concern at their facilities, future mailings will address issues such as: asbestos, lead-based paint, hazardous waste, indoor air quality, chemical selection and storage, radon, diesel bus exhaust and drinking water...

Conte Middle School Remains Closed for Mercury Cleanup

Staff reports - December 01, 2008

iBerkshires

NORTH ADAMS Mass. — **Conte Middle School** will be closed Tuesday as authorities continue cleaning up a mercury spill that occurred early Monday on the building's first floor.

The school was evacuated around 10:30 a.m. after the school nurse discovered what she believed was **mercury** on the first-floor corridor.

On Monday evening, parents dropped off clothing that may have been contaminated when their children stepped near in the spill. Some 20 children may have been exposed; their parents were contacted after school officials checked cameras to see who might have been near the spill.

The clothing collection, like the evacuation, was standard procedure, said officials, based on state procedures.

"Nobody was in danger or at risk," said Superintendent James Montepare on Monday evening. "We're not really concerned that there's going to be a health hazard ... in order for something bad to happen, you would have to be exposed for a long period time, over an extended period of time."

But, he said, "we're covering all the bases."

The spill was discovered and cleaned up in a matter of a few hours, said the superintendent, and the children's exposure was limited.

Public Commissioner E. John Morocco said how and why the spill happened was being investigated.

He said the evacuation had gone extremely well, with the youngsters out of the school and on the buses within an hour.

Noting it was the third recent mercury incident, Morocco said "We're getting pretty good at this."

Morocco and Montepare said safety was an important issue and officials were prepared for incidents such as Monday's.

"The Police Department, Fire Department and School Department work well together, not just on this but on everything," said Morocco.

The Berkshire County hazardous waste team was called to the scene, along with local emergency responders and health officials; the state Departments of Public Health and Environmental Protection were also called. A private contractor was ensuring the building was ensuring the building was cleaned.



Conte is expected to reopen on Wednesday.

Original story posted at 12:58 p.m., Dec. 1, 2008

Hoosac Valley, Conte Schools Close Early

A water main break at Hoosac Valley High School in Adams and a possible mercury spill at Conte Middle School in North Adams forced both schools to close on Monday.

"There was a small, what we believe to be a mercury spill in the first-floor corridor of Conte Middle School," said North Adams Public Safety Commissioner E. John Morocco. "As a precaution we evacuated the school."

Conte was evacuated at about 10:30 a.m., shortly after the possible spill was discovered and the children taken to 1st Congregational Church down the street and the school dismissed from there. Monument Square was closed off so buses could pick up the middle schoolers from the church.

Morocco said it wasn't clear that it was a mercury spill — "it appears to be mercury" — but it was decided to remove the children "with expediency" from the building as a precaution. The evacuation went well, he said, noting that the city schools have practiced for such incidents.

The Berkshire County hazardous waste team had been called to determine exactly what the spill was but had not yet arrived. Morocco said he had also informed the state Departments of Environmental Protection and Public Health.

The city's Fire Department, police and building and health officials and North Adams Ambulance responded to the school.

Conte will be closed the rest of the day. Officials could not say if it would open on Tuesday.

This is the third mercury incident that the city has had to deal with in as many months: A broken mercury thermometer closed Sullivan Elementary School on Oct. 22 and leaks in **two mercury switches** in City Hall's rooftop heating system closed that building on Sept. 24.

At Hoosac Valley, a water main break on Sunday gave students a five-day holiday. Principal Henry Duval said the break was found by a custodian on Sunday and couldn't be fixed in time for school to open on Monday morning.

The break has already been repaired and won't stop this afternoon's activities. "This is the first day of winter sports and the time trials will go on," said Duval.

And while students got an extra day off for the Thanksgiving weekend, "they'll have to come back and make it up in the summer," he said. "Just like a snow day."

A water main break closed Drury High School in North Adams on Nov. 24.

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