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Tests clear the air at school

■ State orders more tests for specific chemicals.

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Environmental contaminants are causing students at the school to develop cancer. At least 40 current and former students have developed cancer since the school opened in 1973.

Air samples collected on May 22 and 23 were tested for 69 contaminants. A Health Department report recommended that additional studies be done to determine the source of slightly elevated levels of Freon and chlorinated solvents in air samples taken from beneath the school. Students have no exposure to that air, the report stated.

"There was nothing found in the air that was alarming," said Thomas Kump, who is both director of environmental health for Chemung County and president of the Elmira school board. "The best surprise is no surprise. I was very pleased with the results."

Still, some chemicals detected in the preliminary tests of soil samples prompted the state health department to take more air samples on July 20, said Gerald McDonald, a public health specialist with the department.

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CONCERN on the SOUTHSIDE

Questions linger for Southside parents

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"The fact that the air quality fits within the guidelines of the (Environmental Protection Agency) is reassuring," said Linda Walton, whose two children, Elizabeth, 14, and Ryan, 16, attend the school. "But what are the results of the July 20 tests? Is the soil contaminated? We know what could be under the school. Should we be concerned about sending our kids there?"

Walton said she will not force her two children to return to the school this fall if those questions are not answered.

The school at 777 S. Main St. is next to the former American LaFrance plant, a parcel with an extensive industrial history.

The property next to the school was cleaned of industrial wastes contaminated with various metals, solvents and burned organic wastes. Old storage tanks containing paint cleaners, oils and gasoline also were removed from the former American LaFrance site. The four-month cleanup was completed in March.

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