

Latest tests verify school air is safe

By MARGARET COSTELLO
Star-Gazette
mcostello@stargazette.com

The air inside Southside High School has again tested free of harmful contaminants, according to a state report.

The New York Department of Health sampled the air in a basement-level classroom in response to public concern raised during a meeting on Aug. 23.

State officials also retested the air in a basement storage room, the library and an outdoor courtyard to ensure that

the air was safe for students and staff members.

The state found slightly elevated levels of volatile organic compounds in the library and the basement classroom, but the compounds corresponded to those found in the paint that custodial workers were using on nearby lockers.

"It shows that the samples were working," said Tony LaSorte, a health and safety hygienist for the Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

No polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, were de-

CONCERN on the SOUTHSIDE

tected in any of the air samples. PCBs are synthetic chemical pesticides and are suspected carcinogens.

LaSorte also assisted the state in drilling beneath the concrete slab of a basement storage room to test the soil gas for contamination.

Those test results showed elevated amounts of chlorinated solvents and three Freons, compounds used in air-condi-

tioning and refrigeration equipment. None of these compounds have been found inside the school, LaSorte said.

The Elmira school has been the center of attention since a group of parents expressed concern in April about a seemingly elevated rate of cancer among students and former students.

The school, 777 S. Main St., sits on a property contaminated by more than a century of heavy industrial use. Since May, the state Department of Environmental Conservation has taken hundreds of soil

samples that showed elevated levels of metals and other contaminants.

State Health Department officials said during a public meeting on Aug. 23 that the soil contamination does not pose a health risk to students and staff members.

Officials of the state Cancer Surveillance Program said they had confirmed 22 cases of cancer among current and former Southside students, a number the state said is lower than would be expected. However, the rate of testicular cancer among graduates since 1997 is

higher than what would be expected, and the state is reviewing the medical history of those students and their mothers.

The Elmira school board closed the school's sports fields in August until further testing could be done by the state and possibly by an independent environmental engineering firm.

The state conducted more tests on the playing fields in September. Results of those tests are expected to be presented at 6 p.m. Nov. 13 during a meeting of the Southside Advisory Committee in the school's library.

Clipped By:



apatros

Tue, Apr 16, 2019