

Halifax Daily News

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Citadel High air issues could spur construction-rule changes
EDUCATION

LINDSAY JONES

The Education Department is considering re-evaluating school construction schedules after delays in the completion of Citadel High led to concerns over air quality.

"Ideally, the school would be finished two or three months before it's ever opened to let the off-gassing take place, to get the furniture in," Education Minister Karen Casey said after the official opening of the \$32 million school in central Halifax yesterday. "Maybe we need to plan a little better so we don't box ourselves into that."

Due to construction delays, Citadel High became operational Sept. 4 - a month-and-a-half behind schedule and three days prior to the first day of school.

The Halifax Regional School Board has said the delay may be the cause of several complaints of itchiness, sore throats and headaches. Charles Clattenburg, the school board's director of operations, said the school may not have had enough time to air out new chemical gases.

Karen Robinson, a healthy-school consultant hired by the school board and Education Department, had recommended allowing six to eight weeks to allow the school to flush out.

Shortening that period of time would be a "slippery slope," she had warned.

During a tour of Citadel High the day before school started, Robinson said she witnessed teachers complaining of "terrible headaches," stacks of shelving to unwrap, computers to turn on and a ventilation system that wasn't fully functional - something she had recommended should work properly.

In an e-mail to principal Tam Fawcett, Robinson said: "Some people will be obviously affected by the chemicals in the air after short exposure and they need to be protected. Others may have mild symptoms, such as a headache."

Should be warned

Robinson suggested the school tell students and teachers who have asthma, are prone to migraines or who could be pregnant that the air quality is questionable.

Fawcett said teachers were informed at one of the first staff meetings.

No letter was sent home to parents.

"There was no evidence that it was going to be an issue for the entire population," Fawcett said.

Since the beginning of the school year, five teachers and two families have complained of rashes, itchiness, sore throats and headaches. Fawcett said one teacher has been off sick.

The school board has installed air purifiers in classrooms and is running the ventilation system around the clock.

So far, tests for volatile organic compounds - released from paints, glues, new furniture and cleaners - didn't reveal any dangerous contamination, though higher levels were found in the cafeteria and stairwells.

Both the school board and the province recently did more tests and are awaiting further results.

Transportation Department spokesman Dan Davis said construction was stalled because time estimates were too conservative for the demolition of the former Nova Scotia Community College and the tender and design process.

"The timeline was squeezed from the get go," Davis said.

As the president of Enviro-Health Consulting, and Canadians for a Safe Learning Environment, Robinson developed guidelines for the construction of Halifax West that later became part of the Education Department's school design manual.

She said construction workers should have worked 24-7 to get the job done earlier, but Davis said that's never done and would have been too expensive.

School board spokesman Doug Hadley said Citadel High had to open on time. He said delaying the start would have put the whole year at risk, particularly because classes are semestered.

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27/11/07

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worried from ns writes: I cannot imagine the lack of planning, putting childrens health at risk as well as the people who are there to teach and guide them.. This is a new modern facility, someone need to take a fall here...Oh just heard that \$30,000,000 is needed to repair the Dept. of Health headquarters , now thats really scary...

Posted 27/11/2007 at 8:43 AM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

past voc school wkr from hrm writes: I just hope that all the contaminated soil from the old tanks that leaked on the same site of the NSCC Bell rd Campus were cleaned up properly, there were issues at the old campus in regard to this problem and people were getting ill there also. some cleanup was done but just how much was left is anyones guess.

Posted 27/11/2007 at 12:22 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

Lawrence Pickrem from Halifax, Nova Scotia writes: I think that Citadel High is a great addition to Central halifax and I'm proud to say that I'm currently a grade 12 student enrolled. I feel that the air quality is something that should be of concern as well. I have heard many people on more than one occasion complaining about the poor air quality that causes sore throats, itchy skin, and bad headaches. This is a matter of health. The air is already bad enough by living in the city - why make it worse? This issue definitely needs to be addressed.

Posted 27/11/2007 at 2:48 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

Katie Lines from Halifax, NS writes: I am a grade 12 student at Citadel high. Although we are very grateful for our new building there is no need for the health of students and staff to be compromised. Suffering from sore throats for most of the year so far I can bare witness to the affects that the air quality in the building is having on poeple. I have yet to see an air purifier in any of my classes nor have i seen any extra windows open or attempts by staff to circulate fresh air into the building. This is an issue that should ahve been fixed before we entered the building 3 months ago. There needs to action taken imediatly to ensure the health and safety of everyone that uses the school.

Posted 27/11/2007 at 5:11 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

raymond from dartmouth, ns writes: This is a ridiclous situation. who is the incompetent planner in this situation. The incompetent out of touch buracrats at the department of education should come away from their desks for a day and see what goes on in a real school. When is the last time some of the big salary guys from the old boys club ever taught a class. also education minister Casey needs to take full responsibility for allowing students and teachers to be exposed to a possible health risk. SHAME on such educated people.

posted 27/11/2007 at 7:58 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

lois from halifax, ns writes: The principal should have sent a letter home to parents at the beginning of the year informing them of this potential health issue. This is neligence and incompetence on her part. what else are they hiding from us parents?

Posted 27/11/2007 at 8:04 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

al from halifax, ns writes: what is going on at that brand new school? we are hearing stories of bad air quality issues being hidden from parents, daily fights outside the school, drugs dealing in the school. the administration needs to get control of this school. if they can't do the job then hire administrators who have the skills to run such a large school. because this school is in the middle of the city, things need to be under control. I would hate to see what could happen in this small space in the middle of our city if a fight got out of control. maybe it would be under control if principals were hired on their knowledge and not on who they are friends with. hire competent principals who are capable of running the schools.

Posted 27/11/2007 at 8:14 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

oliver from halifax, ns writes: The department of education and minister Casey need to become more aware of the planning time for new schools. this situation of bad air quality is totally unacceptable. Where is Minister Casey's leadership on this one?????

mel from halifax, ns writes: I am a student at Citadel High and I am very upset at the huge amount of drugs that are present in this school. The administrators need to walk the halls and search the lockers.

Posted 27/11/2007 at 10:28 PM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

mel from halifax writes: i thought that when a new school opened, administration would stop smoking right from the start. Well try going in Citadel through the wall of smoke, especially at the back door, especially at start of day. Security are the worst smokers, all the time. And it is so open, top of the bridge, under the bridge, at the south entrance; go look at the butts there. Guess administration is too busy arranging grand openings where Rodney made that remark about Citadel being the safest school in Canada.

Posted 28/11/2007 at 6:16 AM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

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