

Notes

HALIFAX

DISTRICT

SCHOOL

BOARD

JUNE 1996

A REPORT ON SCHOOLS

BY KAREN ROBINSON

PART II

There are conditions, products and practices in our schools which can and do affect the health, behaviour, and performance of our school children and staff. Progress is being made however.

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PROGRESS IS BEING MADE

- The Halifax District School Board now has a DoL-approved protocol for safe removal of asbestos, including nine inch floor tiles.
- Safe cleaning of dirty (mouldy) ventilation systems would require similar Safe Work Practices.
- Some Principals are asking maintenance crews to return in the summer to do potentially hazardous work, and are notifying parents of unavoidable work, risks and precautions.
- Attempts are being made to stop structure leaks and remove mouldy materials such as carpets. *However, the need for strict Safe Work Practices for such work seems to be only partially recognized.*
- Recently, Halifax maintenance management attended the N.S Construction Safety Association's Safety Knowledge Course. This is a valuable course for upgrading Health and Safety knowledge and practices for builders and maintenance companies. I would like to see this or a similar course become a requirement for all maintenance/custodial managers and sub-contractors working in our schools.
- Standards and controls for lower concentration chemical emissions including Volatile Organic Compound (VOH) hazards are expected to be addressed in the new DoL Indoor Air Quality Legislation. This legislation is also expected to require any business with twenty or more employees to have a written Health and safety manual which includes protocols and practices for anything deemed hazardous by the DoL. (See pages 21, 31, 33, and 34 of *Taking Responsibility, Proposed Changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act*.)

SAVING OURSELVES

I have been surprised to learn that many people have not yet made the connection between 'saving the earth' and 'saving ourselves'. Even schools that are proud to have 'Green' programs are not necessarily making the connection that people who are *Chemically Sensitive* or have Environmental Illness are suffering from man-made contamination of the Earth. Environmental Health Issues are part of the human component of Global Environmental Issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE 1995-1996

Helen Lofgren	Kim Harper-Given
David Driscoll	Corinne Harland
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A Report on Schools (continued)

OPTIONS FOR ACTION

Progress is being made, but there is much still to be done. If you know of, or suspect a Health and Safety or Environmental Health issue in your school, here are some options for action:

- Use the Department of Education's *Indoor Air Quality Committee's Bulletin on Indoor Air Quality (June, 1994)* and accompanying *Protocol for Responding to School Indoor Air Quality Complaints*.

- Start with your school's JOHSC in hopes that the problem can be rectified quickly on site. The JOHSC is required to investigate all complaints.

- Some schools have Environment committees (for recycling, etc) and some have Environmental Health committees, often as part of their PTA'S who may also be of help.

- For more serious problems, contact your school board member. The school board should also be notified in writing, but be sure to state you would like it addressed by the appropriate committee, or nothing may be done. Request a written reply by a certain date, and send copies to all interested parties, including MLA's, cleaning and maintenance company, JOHSC, PTA, and ask for their assistance where appropriate. The JOHSC and/or School Board should take action according to the Protocol mentioned above.

- In worst case scenarios, when immediate action is needed, it may be necessary to 'red-flag' the incident. This might mean calling in the Health Inspectors or Department of Labour to Stop Work and possibly evacuate the area.

POLICY UPGRADE

As school boards are making arrangements to amalgamate, now is a good time to request that upgraded health and safety policies and procedures be included in the amalgamation process.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

It is possible to make the schools environmentally safe for

our children. There are schools and scattered classrooms already proving this in our province and elsewhere. If we are informed, alert, and prepared to do the right things for the right reasons, we can protect the well-being of our children and their teachers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

1. *The Healthy School Handbook*, Conquering the Sick Building Syndrome and other hazards around your school, Norma L Miller, Ed.D, NEA Professional Library, Washington, 1995.
2. *Accommodating the Needs of Students with Environmental Sensitivities*, an advocacy package from the AEHA Ottawa Branch, Education Committee, P.O. Box 33023, Nepean, Ont. KEC 3Y9
3. *Report of the Committee on Environmental Health*, Halifax District School Board, July 1994.

Please note: This report is not a product of the Committee itself, but rather, a document released by a respected citizen who has knowledge and concerns of environmental health issues. Since this report was written, the Halifax District School Board has taken steps to address many of these kinds of health concerns such as those written in the report. Environmental Health issues are being addressed by the Board, and improvements being made as quickly as budgets allow. Conrad LeBlanc from the Maintenance Dept. of the School Board, sits on the Environmental Health Committee.

The Marketplace

Please note: the purpose of The Marketplace is to share information with the readers, not to endorse any particular product or company.

Ralph Nader and the Cancer Prevention Coalition have started an annual Dirty Dozen list of products which contain carcinogenic and toxic ingredients or contaminants. Nader says that the toxic ingredients don't need to be there. The US Food and Drug thinks that all these products are safe for normal use. The list included frankfurters, whole milk, talcum powder, Cover Girl Replenishing Natural Finish make-up, Crest Tartar Control toothpaste, Alberto VO-5 Conditioner (Essence of Natural Henna), Clairol Nice 'n Easy permanent hair color, Ajax cleanser, Zud Heavy Duty Cleanser, Lysol Disinfectant Spray, Zodiac Cat and Dog Flea Collar, and Ortho Weed-B-Gon Lawn Weed Killer.

Mold: Is it in Your House?

by Cory Galbraith

This article was given to the AEHA with permission from CMHC for wide release. Even though it focuses on mold in housing, it applies to schools as well.

If you've been noticing a musty smell in your house lately, if someone in the family has been feeling mysteriously ill, or if you've spotted water stains – you may have a mold problem in your house. A recent survey by Health Canada found that 35 per cent of Canadian homes had indications of excessive dampness or mold. Molds are microorganisms that cause and encourage allergies, asthma and other health problems. Mold is usually the result of excessive moisture or humidity and can show up virtually anywhere, including bed mattresses and clothing. Houses that are subject to flooding or sewer back-up can require professional expertise and extensive treatment including the complete removal of moisture damaged walls and interior finishes.

Identifying Mold

Is it mold or is it dirt? If you suspect a mold problem, dab the stain or mark with a chlorine bleach solution, making certain the area is well-ventilated. If the colour is entirely or largely removed, the stain is likely organic and probably mold and it's time for a clean-up!

Cleaning Practices

If you're removing mold in your home, it's extremely important to wear protective clothing, primarily a face mask that effectively filters out dust, fibres and particles. Mold can trigger a strong allergic response, serious enough in some cases to require medical attention. To decontaminate surfaces, use a five per cent solution of chlorine bleach or equivalent in water. Be sure the area is well ventilated.

For normal clean-ups to reduce the risk of mold, high-powered cleaners that include volatile chemicals are not recommended since they are ineffective in dealing with mold or are in themselves a risk to human health. Use either baking soda or vinegar in water. When the surface is greasy, dishwashing detergent should be used but the surfaces rinsed off later. Any soap or detergent not entirely removed during cleaning or rinsing can leave a film, which can later hold further dirt. For stubborn areas, washing soda or borax can replace baking soda and when vinegar is inadequate, a solution of ammonia and water can be used, but only in well-ventilated areas.

Vacuuming to Remove and Prevent Mold

When you use an ordinary vacuum cleaner, you may be contributing to the distribution of mold. Because they do not collect very fine particles that can get deep into the lung, they blow them out through the exhaust into the indoor air. Also, scrubbing a carpet can resuspend fine particles if done over-vigorously and carelessly. Use a central vacuum cleaner that exhausts directly to the outdoors.

Vacuum cleaners with high-efficiency particulate arresting (HEPA) filters, used by some cleaning companies, can also be used safely, but even in these cases, there is a certain way to clean. Carefully stroke in a forward direction only, slightly lifting during the return stroke to capture local dust in the air. All vacuuming will stir up dust to some extent.

Moldy household products, including furnishings, that have been wet or subjected to long periods of dampness, such as in a wet basement or crawl space, should be discarded or decontaminated. This is often the least expensive and time-consuming step, and the best move for your health. If an item cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, there may be no other way to solve the problem.

Preventative Measures Through Renovation

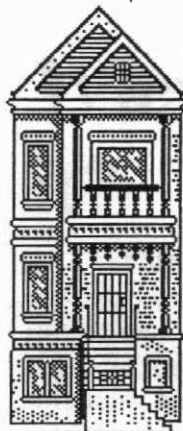
If you're planning to renovate, there are ways you can help reduce the opportunities for mold growth. One way is to reduce the sources of moisture. If you have to move an interior wall to increase the space in your kitchen, have your contractor ensure the inside of the wall has a "vapor barrier," usually made from a polyethylene sheet, to prevent moisture damage in the walls.

Your basement should be checked for obvious moisture sources such as cracks in foundation walls and basement window leaks. Most basements do not have obvious problems but still pass a great deal of moisture through the concrete. Because foundation drainage is hidden from view and expensive to repair, it is often in poor shape. Proper drainage is critical for a dry basement. Moisture can come from many sources, primarily people, (with showers, cooking, and the laundry room.) It can also come from surrounding soil. The more moisture, the higher the humidity level, and the greater the chance of mold growth. Relative humidity above 70 per cent in summer and above 55 per cent in winter are associated with moisture and condensation problems.

Warm Surfaces

Providing warm interior surfaces will help prevent condensation that can stimulate mold growth. This may involve adding insulation to walls that are opened as part of a renovation project. There may be the opportunity of insulating the bathtub during bathroom renovations. Wherever possible, cracks and holes should be sealed including those around electrical boxes and switches. Modifications like these not only reduce condensation, they also make your home more comfortable and energy efficient. When air sealing your home, provide adequate ventilation. This could range from quiet bathroom or kitchen fans for wet areas, to a whole-house ventilation system. For more information, consult the CMHC publication "Clean-Up Procedures for Mold in Houses" (available for \$3.00) P.O. Box 9315, Station A,

Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 5W9 Tel: (902) 426-3530



A Newsletter for Parents

Some kids...

(perhaps even *your* kids) are overactive, fidgety, irritable, aggressive, underactive, depressed, moody, easily distracted, distracts others, can't concentrate, have inconsistent performance in speech, writing, coordination, have difficulty problem solving or miss too much school.....

Why?

Because many of them are unable to tolerate continued exposure to common substances in their everyday environment or surroundings, ie. home or school. Often they don't even know it!

What can we do about it?

We are all being asked to look carefully at how our practices are affecting the people we care about most, and the people we work and study with. One suggestion for schools is a NO SCENT direction. Avoid perfumed detergents, fabric softeners, hairsprays, perfumes, permanent markers, scented markers, smelly erasers, scratch and sniff stickers. These types of products are now known to be causing sensitivities in many students. It is strongly recommended that we try to avoid their use, especially in schools. The staff and parents of many schools now realize a No Scents policy makes good sense! We ask you to help in this *No Scent* effort to make breathing easier for everyone.

Sources of Indoor Air Pollution

Many sources of indoor air pollution and contaminants are found in schools as well as homes. Avoidance of exposure to toxic substances is recommended and these may include: Scented products (perfumes, deodorants, shampoos), Cleaning products, Bactericides, fungicides and pesticides, Petro chemicals including exhaust fumes, Humidification systems, Humid and wet conditions, Heating and cooling systems, Older Computer terminals and printers, Photocopy machines, Laminating machines, Arts and craft supplies, Tobacco Smoke and /or smoke laden clothing, molds and dust, Synthetic materials (especially clothing, carpeting, underpadding).

Shopping for School Supplies

When you are shopping for new products for home use, or purchasing new school supplies for the next school year, you would be helping your child and the others by avoiding scented products. Perhaps the number of children who are being affected by chemically laden products will be shorter next year...thanks to you and all the others who care. Have a great summer!