

Asbestos find prompts board to tighten rules

The CH Mer Nov 7/94

By **CATHY SHAW**
Education Reporter

Safety procedures will be adopted for floor repairs in Halifax schools after the recent discovery of asbestos in tiles at Rockingham School.

Workers replacing floor tiles "didn't follow a set procedure, which is the asbestos removal procedure," said Gordon Young, director of education for the Halifax district school board. "They should have ... but they didn't and they are going to do it in the future."

A parent of two Rockingham schoolchildren alerted maintenance staff that asbestos is sometimes an ingredient in older floor tiles. Karen Robinson was initially concerned Oct. 21 about excessive construction dust in her daughter's classroom, where workers had removed old tiles.

"There was dust and dirt everywhere," Mrs. Robinson said Saturday. "We don't know what was in the construction dust. It shouldn't be ingested or inhaled."

After doing some research, she had a tile tested at her own expense. Results indicated a minimum of one to five per cent asbestos.

"It wasn't an extreme health risk," said Mrs. Robinson. "But reasonable safety procedures for cleanup should be used. There is a protocol for handling asbestos and it should have

'Safety procedures for cleanup should be used. There is a protocol for handling asbestos and it should have been followed.'

KAREN ROBINSON

Parent of two Rockingham school children

been followed."

Further tests showed no asbestos in the room dust, Mr. Young said Sunday. "All of the tests that they did came back absolutely negative."

But the school board will nevertheless adopt the elaborate safety precautions for asbestos removal, which include wearing special clothing and masks.

And cleaners will be brought in this week to steam clean the affected classroom for the second time.

"It's going to be ultra, ultra clean, just to make sure," said Mr. Young. "As far as we're concerned this is a really sensitive issue."

Mrs. Robinson said she is satisfied with the outcome of the maintenance mishap.

"We don't have a sick school. We just have these little problem areas," she said. "I'm relieved the room is now safe again."



School board sweeps away plan for cleaning contract

By PETER McLAUGHLIN
The Daily News

Halifax regional school board quietly cancelled a decision to negotiate a new contract with a private cleaning company that would have seen it take over custodial services for metro schools.

With no debate, board members voted to rescind a decision made earlier this month to negotiate a deal to extend and enhance a partnership with Ontario-based Servicemaster.

The company already has a contract to take care of Halifax city schools. That arrangement was made by the former Halifax school board.

Dartmouth member Don Chard called for the reversing of the regional board's decision last night.

He said new information has come to light suggesting other

companies may be interested in bidding for the job.

The earlier decision has been criticized by a group that alleged health and safety violations by the company and objected to the types of cleaning products it uses.

"I'm just delighted, absolutely delighted," Karen Robinson, president of Citizens for a Safe Learning Environment, said last night.

In other business, the board was told its projected deficit for the year can be held to \$2.3 million if it agrees to extend its early retirement packages over 10 years, rather than seven.

Most of the shortfall comes from a major provincial funding cut the former Halifax board took earlier this year. The rest of the shortfall comes from a \$947,000 reduction in supplementary funding from the municipality.

Teen jailed for torching food bank

SYDNEY (CP) — A teenager was sent to prison yesterday for breaking in to and setting fire to a food bank earlier this month.

Greg Lee Burns, 18, received a two-year term for break-and-enter and a six-month concurrent sentence for arson.

He was described during sentencing as a troubled teen who has a drug and alcohol problem and a fascination with fire.

Burns said he feels bad about what he did but can't change it.

A 16-year-old male will be sentenced later for his role in the incident at the Loaves and Fishes food bank, which sustained fire damage and lost half its food.

The shelves have since been restocked through donations.

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Group calls for testing of schools

By BRUCE ERSKINE
Education Reporter

Independent experts should be hired to determine the extent to which Nova Scotia schools are making people sick, says a citizens' group.

"It is a widespread issue," said Karen Robinson of Halifax, president of Citizens For A Safe Learning Environment.

She was commenting after parents pulled approximately 250 children out of Duncan MacMillan High School in Sheet Harbour on Wednesday over concerns about air quality. As well, more than 100 children at Halifax's

Grosvenor-Wentworth Park Elementary School have a gastrointestinal illness some parents link to the school building.

"Parents recognize that schools are putting students' health at risk," said Ms. Robinson, whose group has 100 members provincially.

She said funding cuts have a role in the rundown condition of schools.

"Schools have suffered from what's called deferred maintenance. When funds are tight, corners are cut to building maintenance before programs

■ See Schools / A2

Schools

■ continued from / A1

or curriculum are threatened."

That neglect, combined with the use of toxic cleaning and maintenance substances, has hurt air quality in schools and affected children's health and their ability to learn, Ms. Robinson said.

Education Minister Robbie Harrison said Thursday his department is doing all it can to address demands for new and renovated schools.

"We believe a relationship with the private sector can help us do that," he said, referring to the province's controversial partnership plan for school construction.

Students and staff at the Sheet Harbour school have long complained of mould-related headaches, fatigue and breathing problems, despite school board assurances that air in the building is fine. On Thursday, the school was closed until further notice by Don Trider, superintendent of the Halifax regional school board.

At Grosvenor-Wentworth, vice-principal Bryan Olsen said Thursday that health officials believe a 48-hour virus spread by touch had hit the school, which also remains open. "They ruled out any connection with the building," he said.

However, the father of a hospi-

talized student is not convinced of that.

"The younger kids affected were in the older part of the school," he said, adding his son is at home on antibiotics and feeling a little better.

Health Minister Jim Smith said such outbreaks are common this time of year.

"I think sometimes the flu will take this pattern, but I think when you see that many involved ... rather suddenly, that's sometimes a good sign that it clears suddenly," said Dr. Smith, a family physician.

Ms. Robinson said many schools causing health problems were built in the 1950s and '60s, have inadequate ventilation and weren't designed for use beyond 30 years.

"Now we are paying the price."

Her group wants school boards to apply for provincial emergency funding to repair and upgrade schools, based on the results of independent analysis.

Pat Smith, president of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, said the government, not school boards, should pay for the analysis. She said the Education Act guarantees safe and healthy learning environments. "School boards don't have the money."

■ With files from provincial reporter Amy Smith

OCTOBER 24,
1997

Canadians offer help to hurricane victims

In the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, Central Americans are getting help from Canada.

More than 9,000 people in the region are believed dead, with Honduras and Nicaragua bearing the brunt of the storm.

The federal government will provide a \$1-million assistance package through the Canadian International Development Agency. Locally, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish is contributing \$25,000.

People wishing to make further donations can contact the Latin American Committee at 69 King's Road, Sydney, Nova Scotia, B1S 1A2.

Other agencies collecting for the effort are:

- The Salvation Army, at P.O. Box 8954, Halifax, N.S. B3K 5M6 or phone 1-888-321-3433.
- World Vision Canada has committed \$15,000 to the Mitch Relief effort to date. Donors can call 1-800-268-1650.
- The Canadian Red Cross, 1-800-418-1111.
- Save the Children Canada has committed \$45,000 for emergency relief. Donors can call 416-221-5501 ext. 224.
- CARE Canada, 1-800-267-5232.

School boards trying to clear the air

By JOANN SHERWOOD
Education Reporter

Health and safety officer on the job

Regional school boards are getting more tools to help combat the air-quality problems that keep cropping up in the province's aging schools.

The Department of Education has hired an environmental health and safety officer, who began work Monday. Gerald Muise, who previously worked with the Annapolis Valley regional school board, has 25 years of experience in occupational health and safety.

He will help schools take steps to avoid environmental outbreaks and investigate any problems. His job will also involve communicating with parents, students and teachers.

"(The hiring) is in response to a request from the boards for a departmental partnership on this issue," Education Minister Robbie Harrison said Monday.

"It's all part of adding to the team that can bring resources, as necessary, to prevent problems from happening in the first place and to solve as quickly as possible those problems that develop with

what is still an aging population of buildings."

The education minister said Mr. Muise will have access to departmental resources, including the province's \$2.4-million emergency fund to help boards solve serious air-quality problems.

Mr. Muise said he expects to be busy travelling to many of the province's 461 schools.

"There's a genuine interest on the part of all interested parties to make the air better," he said Monday.

"That's not going to happen by good luck. It's going to happen by good management."

Mr. Muise, who was hired on a one-year contract, began his new job by attending a meeting with the student council at Central Kings Rural High School. Many of the school's 900 students walked out of class Oct. 19 for a day because of recurring health problems related to the air.

Student representatives also met Monday with Mr. Harrison and board officials to discuss

what steps are being taken to address their concerns.

Mr. Muise is to travel to the Barrington area later this week.

"It's not one of those jobs where I'll have to sit down and wait for work," he said.

"This is a major issue. We get different problems with different schools at different times."

The province has spent \$50,000 to purchase five indoor air-quality detective monitors. The monitors, recently developed by New Trend Environmental Services of Dartmouth, can detect fine particles in the air. Such particles, which are linked to air quality problems, can't be seen or smelled, and don't show up with conventional testing.

The \$10,000 devices will be shared by the seven regional boards and the Education Department. The monitors will be used, for example, to check school boilers for leaks during installation or routine maintenance.

Frank Barteaux, executive director of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, said board

staff across the province have already been trained to use the new equipment.

Karen Robinson, president of Citizens for a Safe Learning Environment, said the presence of a specialist will help more school boards take action on air

quality.

"That's what you call putting your money where your mouth is," said Ms. Robinson, whose group lobbies to improve environmental conditions in Nova Scotia schools.

"Now there will be someone who is very well versed in buildings, labour laws and occupational health and safety."

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- ☐ **school cleaning and maintenance**
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- ☐ **school cleaning and maintenance**
Nov 14,1996 CBC News
- ☐ **ServiceMaster reply to CASLE's assertions**
Nov 15,1996 CBC news
- ☐ **report on CASLE's public lecture on school IAQ**
Nov 1996 CBC News
- ☐ **Duncan MacMillan High School**
Fall, 1997 CBC News
- ☐ **Sick Schools**
Dec, 1997 Global TV News
- ☐ **Sick Schools, national perspective, 3 person panel**
Jan, 1998 CBC Midday
- ☐ **Aging/sick schools, West Kings, Brookfield, Duncan MacMillan**
Dec. 1998 CBC News
- ☐ **research and treatment issues**
May 21,2000 Shaw TV News
- ☐ **Pesticide Interview**
May 24,2000 ATV News

Selected Newspaper Interviews Karen Robinson

- ☐ **School buildings pose health risks to children and teachers**
November 08, 1994 Canadian Press
- ☐ **Sick-school problem won't go away**
November 09, 1994 Canadian Press
- ☐ **Opponents air views on no-scent school policy**
Sept. 16, 1998 Chronicle Herald
- ☐ **Onus on boards to monitor school air**
November 08, 1997 Chronicle Herald
- ☐ **Province trying to clear air in schools - Health and safety officer hired**
November 09, 1998 Chronicle Herald
- ☐ **No Simple Answers**
Jan. 12, 1998 Chronicle-Herald

Selected Radio Interviews Karen Robinson

- ☐ **Indoor Air Quality(IAQ) & children's health
Feb. 2002 CJCH**
- ☐ **school custodial strike
Apr. 2001 CJCH**
- ☐ **chemical fragrance issues
May 29, 2000 ABC Australia**
- ☐ **chemical fragrance issues
May, 2000 BBC Overnight**
- ☐ **fragrance industry conference
Apr. 25, 2000 CJCH**
- ☐ **school talk show w. HRSB Board Chair and Superintendent
Sept. 9, 1999 CJCH**
- ☐ **First Dr. Bruce Elliott memorial lecture
Dec. 6, 1999 CJCH**
- ☐ **school cleaning materials
Sept 3, 1999 CJCH**
- ☐ **politics for treatment of sick building syndrome and environmental illness
Feb. 1998 CJCH**
- ☐ **new schools
Dec. 8, 1997 CBC Information Morning**
- ☐ **school IAQ
Nov. 27+28, 1997 CBC Information Morning**
- ☐ **understanding environmental illness
Dec. 1995 CBC Sunday Morning**
- ☐ **living with environmental illness
Jan. 4, 1992 CBC Maritime Magazine**

Too few parents involved — board

By JoAnn Sherwood
Education Reporter

Show me the parents.
That's what Halifax regional school board members are telling senior staff these days.

At issue is the small number of parents involved in advisory groups reviewing board policies and programs.

"We need parents involved in the process," board chairwoman Stella Campbell said in an interview Wednesday. "Right now, we don't have that. It's a narrow perspective."

Only nine of the 21 groups set up last fall include parents, with two other groups still being finalized. Most participants are principals, teachers, administrators and board members.

The advisory groups will make recommendations to the board over the next two years in such areas as: early literacy programs, transportation, the role of school advisory councils, maintenance standards and library services.

Halifax parent Dick Tilley said the board will have a tough time selling changes to parents unless they're consulted first.

"It's a real concern that they're going to come up with things that will have a clearly one-sided approach," said Mr. Tilley, chairman of the Halifax District Parent-Teacher Association.

Mr. Tilley, whose umbrella group represents 35 Halifax schools, said he received a call last week from a principal seeking parents for a study of partnerships between school and other agencies or businesses.

"This was the first call we had," he said.

Karen Robinson, president of Citizens for a Safe Learning Environment, said her group contacted the board's central office to join two committees examining school environmental issues.

"If parents are sitting out there thinking they could contribute, they shouldn't hold their breath. They should call and offer."

Senior staff have told board members that review group leaders have been reminded more than once to branch out and include parents, other employee unions and interested community groups.

Board members recently sent a group studying principals' selection back to the drawing board to get feedback from parents.

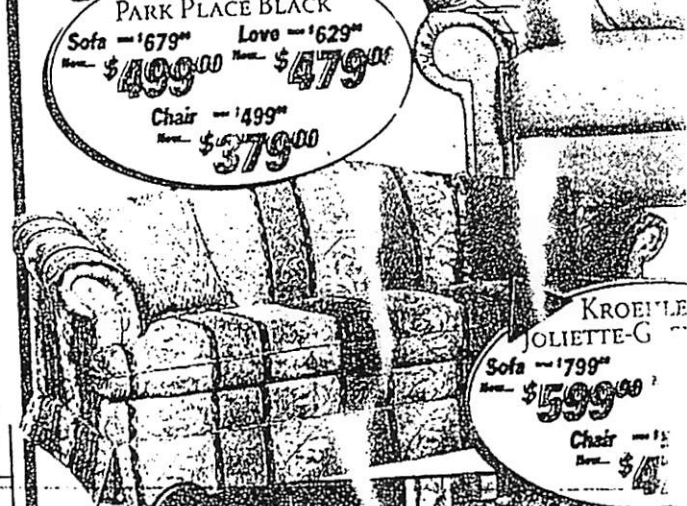
"I know the information has gone out in terms of getting more people. I'm waiting to see what happens next," Ms. Campbell said.

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