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EWG Analysis of PCB Contamination in Schools

Thousands of American schools may be contaminated with unsafe concentrations of toxic polychlorinated biphenyls leaching from caulks, sealants and other aging building materials and fixtures.

PCBs, manufactured from the 1920s to the 1970s, were once used as insulators for electrical equipment, oils for hydraulic systems and motors, solvents, and components of fluorescent light fixtures.

These chemicals can cause a variety of health problems, including cancer, harm to the immune system, neurological damage, learning deficits, lowered birth weight and decreased thyroid hormone function.

Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., has calculated that up to 30 percent of American children in elementary, middle and high school may still be exposed to these dangerous industrial chemicals, despite a 1979 ban by the Environmental Protection Agency.

According to data provided to Markey's office by the EPA, which was also analyzed by EWG, over the past 10 years, the federal agency has received 286 reports of potential PCB contamination in school buildings in 20 states. These incidents ranged from the removal of a single fluorescent light fixture to large-scale remediation undertaken by some of the nation's largest school districts. In addition to schools, EPA reports also include colleges and universities where PCBs have been found.

This PDF document represents the EPA regional summary submitted in response to Sen. Markey's inquiry. The PDF contains information for those schools in a given EPA region where PCBs were detected. Please note that many states have not yet tested for PCBs in schools. Most school building constructed between the 1950s and the late 1970s are highly likely to test positive for these chemicals, potentially endangering the health of students and teachers.

Please note that this regional school summary prepared by EPA includes Sky Valley Education Center in Monroe, Washington (located in EPA Region 10).

July 8, 2016

EPA, Region 5 Schools with PCBs Associated with Building Materials

Name of School and Location	Description of Situation	School Response	EPA Response
Anderson School Anderson, Indiana	In September of 2014 a teacher reported a foul order from a failed light fixture. EPA inspected and found the failed fixture contained a leaking PCB light ballasts. Other light fixtures in the school also found to contain leaking PCB ballasts.	The school district didn't follow EPA guidance and failed to properly clean PCBs released from light ballasts.	In December of 2014 EPA issued a strongly worded letter requiring decontamination of light fixtures. A follow up inspection in March of 2015 proved decontamination was not achieved. In August 2015, EPA issued a CAFO that required decontamination and remitted the civil penalty only if decontamination was complete. PCB remediation including removal of all PCB impacted light fixtures was completed in September 2015.
Gary School District Gary, Indiana	July 2015: EPA enters into PCB settlement negotiations with Heritage Crystal Clean that include a Supplemental Environmental Project for PCB light ballast removal in a school. In December 2015 EPA identifies older model light fixtures at Gary Schools suspected to contain PCBs.	Gary Schools will enter into a MOU with Heritage Crystal Clean to accept \$400,000 for replacement of light fixtures suspected to contain PCBs (July 2016).	EPA will enter into a CAFO with Heritage Crystal Clean that requires payment of a \$100,000 cash penalty and a \$400,000 escrow account to fund replacement of light fixtures in Gary Schools suspected to contain PCBs (July 2016).
Sky Valley Education Center, Monroe, Washington	Starting in September 2015 several teachers and students report mysterious illnesses. School reports to EPA R10 that over the years several PCB light ballasts around the school have failed and leaked.	School's response is inadequate. Spills from PCB ballasts aren't properly remediated.	R10 requests assistance from R5 for enforcement. In March of 2016, R5 inspects the school and discovers PCB levels on light fixtures exceed the decontamination standard. R5 requires decontamination and testing. The school hires a consultant who also discovers PCBs in caulk. R5 requires a remediation plan to address light fixtures

			<p>and caulk. In May of 2016 the school submitted a remediation plan to replace light fixtures and remove PCB caulk by September 2016.</p>
<p>University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio</p>	<p>Discovery of PCB caulk within curtain wall of dormitory building (2011) during preparatory work for building renovation. Curtain wall caulk from a second similar era construction dorm building was assumed to be identical for purposes of disposal. Soils around buildings also had low-level PCB contamination.</p>	<p>University submits plans to remove caulk, encapsulate substrates, and remediate soils.</p>	<p>EPA reviewed and approved University remedial plans in 2011, 2013 and 2015.</p>