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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.

July 11, 2016

EPA, Region 7 Schools with PCBs Associated with Building Materials

Name of School and Location	Description of Situation	School Response	EPA Response
University of Nebraska, Lincoln Lincoln Nebraska	The school is renovating two buildings to include windows and some walkway.	The school tested caulking for PCBs prior to beginning the renovation and submitted a plan to EPA to address the PCBs.	EPA approved the plan.
Washington University St. Louis, Missouri	The school is renovating two buildings to include windows and some walkway.	The school tested caulking for PCBs prior to beginning the renovation and submitted a plan to EPA to address the PCBs.	EPA approved the plan.