



# Worcester Public Schools

Office of the Superintendent

## Worcester, Massachusetts

Dr. John E. Durkin Administration Building  
20 Irving Street  
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609-2493



Tel: (508) 799-3115  
Fax: (508) 799-3119

Maureen F. Binienda  
Superintendent

February 8, 2018

To the Students, Families, and Staff of Doherty Memorial High School,

As you may have heard, several of the school buildings in our system are suspected of containing building materials that have PCBs in them. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a type of synthetic oil that was widely used in building materials until the 1970s. The federal government banned most uses of PCBs in 1979 because of concerns about their toxicity and their persistence in the environment. I am writing now to explain the approach the District has taken to manage PCBs in our school buildings.

First and foremost, we have no reason to believe that students or school staff have been exposed to dangerous amounts of PCBs. I want to personally assure you that we take the issue of PCBs in our schools quite seriously and we have been aggressive in safely managing materials suspected of containing PCBs. As discussed below, the US Environmental Protection Agency has reported that in schools the exposure to PCBs in air is the greatest concern. Last spring we conducted an air sampling program at Doherty Memorial High School and found that PCBs were at concentrations well below EPAs recommended safe levels. We plan to repeat this testing later this month to confirm our earlier results.

### **US EPA's Best Management Practices for PCBs**

Many buildings, not only schools, constructed or renovated between 1950 and 1978 were built with materials that contained PCBs. No additional PCB containing materials have been used since the 1979 ban 40 years ago. In 2010 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) alerted schools about the possibility of PCBs in buildings and they made recommendations for managing PCBs in buildings so as to minimize exposures to students and staff.

According to EPA, the presence of PCBs in a building is not a cause for alarm. If PCBs are suspected, then EPA recommends that best management practices (BMPs) be taken to manage the suspect building materials. In 2012, the Worcester Public Schools voluntarily adopted the EPA's recommendations for BMPs in all our schools. These BMPs include:

1. Remove all suspected PCB-containing fluorescent light ballasts. EPA has identified the removal of PCB containing light ballasts as the single most important step for reducing potential exposures. Note that New York City schools have just completed this step earlier last year; this is something WPS completed 5+ years ago.

2. Conduct the actions listed below on a frequent on-going basis to reduce possible exposures to PCBs.
  - a. Maintain ventilation systems so that they are operating properly
  - b. Clean inside of schools frequently to reduce dust and residue
  - c. Use a wet or damp cloth or mop to clean surfaces
  - d. Use vacuums with high efficiency air (HEPA) filters
  - e. Do not sweep with dry brooms or use dry cloth for dusting
3. Remove suspect PCB-containing caulk, paint and other suspect PCB-containing building materials during planned renovations and repairs.
4. Consider encapsulating suspect materials to reduce the potential for PCB exposure.

The School Committee adopted an updated PCB Management Plan in May 2017 to ensure our BMPs are planned, conducted and documented on a regular basis.

I can assure you that all of these recommended best management activities have been ongoing at the school. As part of this management plan, the District has committed to at least annual air sampling of PCBs in the school until the school is replaced or renovated. The District conducted similar air sampling for PCBs at the school on April 24, 2017 and all results were well below the EPA's recommended levels.

In accordance with our management plan, the Worcester Public Schools will conduct the next air testing for PCBs at Doherty Memorial High School on Thursday, February 22, 2018.

The testing will be conducted by an independent environmental consultant with excellent credentials. The monitoring will take place during February vacation with windows closed and the air handling system operating normally. The Educational Association of Worcester (the local teacher's union) has been invited to observe the air sampling. Approximately 10 air samples will be collected in the building. The test results and any recommendations for additional actions will be shared with the school community approximately two weeks after the samples are collected (to allow time for laboratory analysis). The district will also share the results with the EPA.

If you have any questions, please contact the district's Environmental Consultant Lynn Rose at (508) 799-3151.

Sincerely,



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Maureen F. Binienda  
Superintendent of Schools