

Portage Northern High School Air Quality Task Force Progress Report, March 12, 2010

Overview:

The Portage Northern Air Quality Task Force has met three times since it was formed March 3 to address air quality concerns at the high school. This is the second public report issued by the task force. Three more meetings are scheduled over the next 10 days. A third public report is expected to be issued by the group on Monday, March 22.

The Task Force Creation and Charge:

Task force members were invited to serve in an advisory role to examine concerns raised about the potential of health effects or danger stemming from construction on the Portage Northern site. Ten persons -- representing various constituencies with an interest in Portage Public Schools -- were invited to serve and all 10 accepted. According to Co-Chair Tom Noverr, the task force expanded the charge, during the first meeting, to include other ongoing and future construction at Portage Public Schools.

Serving with Noverr on the committee are Co-Chair Jim French, Northern High School Principal; Grace Hill, Northern student; Don Jones, Northern parent; Connie Livingston, Northern parent; Joel Shaffer, Northern teacher; Stacie Phillips, Northern teacher; Bonnie VanEenaam, Northern teacher; Mike Huber, assistant principal at Northern; and Tom Zahrt, PPS Human Resources.

Task Force Work in First Three Meetings:

Each task force meeting has lasted roughly two hours. The task force organized itself, reviewed preliminary material and set up meeting ground rules at the first meeting. After the first meeting, the task force issued a public invitation, through the school's web site and the media, for individuals to submit comments, questions and concerns through the the task force's email address: nhstaskforce@portageps.org. The task force also issued an invitation to members of the public to request the opportunity to appear before the task force. The task force has received two emails and no requests to appear.

In the second and third meetings, task force members reviewed information and listened to reports regarding architectural design, materials, construction and environmental testing. Task force members also had a chance to interview experts in construction, design, materials, air quality and testing.

Task Force Topics:

No single topic has dominated the discussions, and a number of the topics below were visited more than once and, in some cases, in great detail:

- Nature, type, frequency, duration and commonalties of concerns;
- Schools' response to those concerns;
- Information shared at public meetings;
- History/review of the construction process;
- Role of regulatory agencies and their responsibilities;
- Measures taken by construction crews to ensure air quality;
- On-site air quality monitoring;
- Carbon monoxide poisoning;
- Materials handling and equipment staging;
- Construction site traffic and dust control;
- Air intake, air movement, air flow systems and operations;
- Air filter changes;
- Heating and ventilation;
- Contamination and materials separation;
- MIOSHA regulations;
- MIOSHA inspection visit;
- Duct-work sealing;
- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs);
- Possible existence of dangerous chemicals in materials on site;
- Comparison of construction practices vs. other Portage sites;
- Comparison of construction practices vs. other non-Portage sites;
- Types of tests conducted;
- Timing of tests conducted;
- Light fluttering;
- Humidity; and
- Alternative possible causes of discomfort, complaints.

Of the two emails received by the task force, one was an inquiry about use of drywall from China (not used); the other was about electronics in the environment.

Task Force Interim Summary and Recommendations:

According to Noverr, the task force remains interested in public comments and concerns and will continue to receive emails at nhstaskforce@portageps.org. The task force has full agendas for each of the next three meetings, including follow-up from experts regarding unanswered questions; health issues; discussion of construction options; and review of existing tests and reports. There are no task force recommendations at this time. Noverr indicated that task force members feel the volume of the work will extend past Spring Vacation and will include the safety and monitoring of construction sites throughout the school system.