



Rush-Henrietta Central School District

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Testing at Roth Middle School Identifies No Environmental Factors Known to Cause Cancer

Results from an environmental study conducted at Roth Middle School found no environmental factors known to cause cancer, according to a report issued by Leader Professional Services Inc., the firm that conducted the investigation. The testing was ordered by the Rush-Henrietta Central School District in response to concerns raised by employees after two school staff members were diagnosed with cancer. Results of the testing were shared with employees at Roth Middle School during an afterschool meeting Tuesday, April 5, 2016.

At the outset this past winter, Rush-Henrietta sought advice from the New York State Health Department. The state explained that environmental factors can take decades to manifest as cancer, and that the impact is often dependent on the individual genetic makeup of those who may have been exposed to a potential carcinogen. The district was advised that, because cancer is so prevalent in the general population, it was highly unlikely that we would be able to identify an environmental link to these cases.

Nonetheless, as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of our students and staff members and to reassure the community, the Board of Education contracted with Leader Professional Services to test samples of air, soil, and water in and around the school. Michael Rumrill, an environmental expert who serves as president of the Pittsford-based firm he founded in 1995, oversaw the testing.

Indoor Evaluation

As part of its evaluation, the Leader Professional Services team completed multiple site walks inside the school to evaluate how rooms within the building are used and maintained, how they are furnished, and how products used in the school setting are handled and stored. "The building was in very good shape and very clean," says Peter von Schondorf, a professional geologist from Leader Professional Services with more than 30 years of experience in environmental health and safety. "Everything inside was well stored. We were very pleased with what we saw."

The firm's team also performed testing on ventilation adequacy and general indoor air quality. This testing measured levels of relative humidity, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide. In addition, the testing quantified the amounts of volatile organic compounds, formaldehyde, and 4-Phenylcyclohexene found in the air inside the building. All levels measured were orders of magnitude below the Permissible Exposure Levels set by Occupational Health and Safety Administration. "Our measurements indicate that the air quality inside Roth Middle School is, in many respects, better than the air quality that one would breathe inside the average home," says Katherine Root, a certified industrial hygienist from Leader Professional Services with more than 25 years of experience in environmental health and safety.

The study also conducted testing on multiple water sources throughout the building. The water was tested for the presence of bacteria and metals. All samples were within drinking water guidelines with the exception of one sink in the health office. Elevated levels of lead and copper detected at this location likely are associated with a specific plumbing fixture. The district is replacing that sink and related plumbing.

The review of the building interior did not detect any environmental factors known to cause cancer.

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Outdoor Evaluation

Multiple site walks also were conducted on the grounds of the school. A visual screening of the grounds and land immediately adjacent to the school property - examining drainage, surface conditions, topography, and more - was performed. In addition, six soil samples were taken from the property. Each of these samples was screened using a portable volatile organic analyzer. No evidence of contamination was discovered. One sample of acetone, which is often found in nail polish remover, was discovered 12 feet below the surface. Investigators deemed this of no significance.

As part of the outdoor evaluation, Leader Professional Services consulted with regulatory databases. These showed several instances well known to the district, such as a release of fuel oil that was discovered in 1986. In that instance, the contaminated soil was removed under the supervision of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The firm says these incidents are not reason for concern.

In addition, the team reviewed aerial photos of the Roth Middle School property dating back to the 1930s. There was no evidence of commercial or industrial use prior to construction of the school more than 65 years ago. "The photos we looked at showed that this land was primarily used for agricultural purposes - or was wooded - until the school was built," says von Schondorf.

The review of the grounds did not detect any environmental factors known to cause cancer.

Putting the Community at Ease

At the time the district ordered the tests, it shared its belief that "there is no reason to suspect that school-based environmental factors have played a role in the health problems experienced by these staff members." However, it believes the cost associated with the testing - in excess of \$25,000 - was justified.

"We are thankful to our community for its patience while these tests were conducted, and for its continued support," says J. Kenneth Graham Jr., Ph.D., superintendent of schools. "Today's release of the environmental testing report supports our belief that Roth Middle School offers a safe environment for both students and staff members alike. At the same time, we are very cognizant of the fact that two of our colleagues are facing serious health challenges. They will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers."

The health and well being of students and staff members is of utmost importance to the Rush-Henrietta Central School District. So, too, is sharing information with our community. The full report of findings from Leader Professional Services is available on the district website at www.rhnet.org/rothreport.

In addition, the Rush-Henrietta Board of Education will discuss the Roth Middle School report during its regular meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 12, at Parker Administration Building, 2034 Lehigh Station Road.

On a related note, there have been a number of instances locally and nationally of school districts discovering lead in their school water supply. In our continuing effort to help ensure that our school facilities are safe, Rush-Henrietta plans to test water quality in all of its schools and buildings. While we believe that any cause for concern is minimal, the district is committed to providing a healthy environment for students and staff members. Rumrill, of Leader Professional Services, assures us that our water, which is provided by the Monroe County Water Authority, is some of the cleanest in the country. However, water fountains and faucets installed prior to 1986 may have lead in the fittings, so the district will conduct testing during the next several months. If any issues are discovered, the district will share that information with the community and take necessary corrective action.

We thank our community for its continued support of the Rush-Henrietta Central School District.