

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM SCHOOLS/PARENTS REGARDING PCBs

1. Is there any health risk associated with ballasts containing PCBs?

- The scientific evidence, including published medical opinion and environmental testing, firmly supports the conclusion that there is no immediate public health risk to students and staff.
- Research has shown that schools with leaking ballasts did not have air levels of PCBs that provide an immediate health risk for students and staff.
 - This is confirmed by Drs. Maida P. Galvez and Philip J. Landrigan from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in a New York Times article on PCBs.
 - They said, “PCBs at the levels found in most schools in New York City today will not make any child or any teacher acutely ill. In fact, compared with air levels reported in some other studies, air levels reported in NYC schools have been quite low. Therefore, in this particular instance we would say certainly send your child to school. The benefits of going to school far outweigh any risk from PCBs in the school environment.”

2. What about building caulk?

- James D. Okun with the environmental firm of O’Reilly, Talbot & Okun Associates, Inc. has recently written that “Despite their presence in buildings for more than 30 years, there have been no reported adverse health effects attributable to PCBs in building caulk or other building materials.”
- He further states, “Although PCBs are present in the internal and external caulk of some NYC buildings, significant intake of PCBs by breathing or swallowing dust is unlikely.”

3. How will schools be prioritized?

The City will prioritize schools for retrofits in the following order:

- (i) school buildings with visual lighting ballast leaks,
- (ii) buildings constructed between 1950 and 1966 with at least one elementary school,
- (iii) buildings constructed between 1950 and 1966 with secondary schools,
- (iv) buildings constructed between 1967 and 1979 with at least one elementary school,
- (v) buildings constructed between 1967 and 1979 with secondary schools,
- (vi) buildings constructed prior to 1950 with at least one elementary school, and
- (vii) buildings constructed prior to 1950 with secondary schools.

The City will prioritize schools constructed in the 1950s and the early 1960s because the ballasts in these schools are older and the type of ballast is more likely to leak. The City will also prioritize work in Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and elementary schools based on EPA’s September 2009 guidance document “Public Health Levels in School Indoor Air”.

4. How long will the comprehensive plan take?

The City is committed to getting this work done expeditiously and within our technical and economical capacity. Work began last July and is expected to take another nine years to

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complete. In 2014, the City will revisit the timeline based on lessons learned and market changes to see if the timeline can be accelerated for Fiscal Year 2015 and beyond.

5. Why is it going to take 10 years to complete?

The expected ten-year timeline balances the need to ramp up the program strategically within the limitations of market capacity and the need to complete retrofits at these schools as quickly as possible.

It should be emphasized that we thoroughly considered asbestos remediation in developing the Plan's ten-year timeframe. When asbestos is identified, special containment protocols must be followed, which we take seriously. Unfortunately, based upon the lighting replacements we have done to date, we expect that most old light fixtures will contain asbestos insulation. This means that all necessary asbestos abatement requirements, such as removing light fixtures under containment, must be followed. To protect the health and safety of the school community and avoid interruption to educational programs, all work will likely be limited to weekends, school holidays, and summer. This is a major constraint to expediting our Plan.

6. Why is air testing not included in the plan?

Because air levels in tested schools from a pilot program were low, DOHMH does not feel it is necessary to conduct air tests as long as the City is moving forward to replace the lighting fixtures in our school buildings.