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Preliminary test reveals potentially hazardous mercury vapors in floors



A hazardous chemical found in flooring within three elementary schools didn't exceed state safety levels. However, the affected areas will remain off limits pending further testing this summer, according to a New Jersey school official in Deptford Township.



That official, School Superintendent Arthur Dietz, informed parents and staff about positive tests that found mercury in the affected flooring in the Central and Pine Acres early childhood centers and at the Shady Lane Elementary School. *"We received the air quality results, which showed mercury vapors present, but below the New Jersey Department of Health action limit,"* according to Dietz. But Dietz assured readers: *"The safety of our students, staff, and community remains our top priority."* Tests showed mercury vapor levels were notably below .8 micrograms per cubic meter of air. Only readings above that level are not considered safe.



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Nevertheless, further testing will be conducted this summer, when higher temperatures could possibly elevate the levels. Deptford's not alone. The city is among a number of districts in New Jersey suspected to be dealing with mercury issues, according to the New Jersey Education Association, which warned its members that 11 unions have sought assistance and suspects there are "*more mercury-laced floors out there*" that should be tested.



While Washington Township found it in flooring in eight of the township's 11 schools, only one of these eight schools, Whitman Elementary, had levels that actually exceeded safe limits. Officials said the levels there dropped to acceptable after reducing the temperature from 72 degrees to 68 degrees in the room and running the ventilation 24 hours a day. The mercury was used during the installation of some rubberized flooring before 2000 and several years thereafter. Deteriorating floors are emitting mercury vapors which can be hazardous. The remediation effort in Washington Township could cost as much as \$3.2 million officials there said.



An engineer the district hired to study the problem said she thinks the issue extends far beyond Washington Township. It's serious: "*This is not just a Washington Township problem, this is not just a state problem, this is a national problem,*" according to Annina Hogan. No cost estimates have been cited for Deptford.

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Press Release

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