

WMS air sample shows asbestos

By: Scott Benjamin November 01, 2002

An air sample in an art room at Whisconier Middle School came back above the asbestos detection limit this week and the results of a follow-up test are expected to be available by today.

The sample, which is part of the school district's asbestos monitoring program, was one of 20 that were randomly taken in the district. The other 19 samples showed that the air quality in those areas was within acceptable levels.

All four public schools were closed in late spring after asbestos contamination was discovered. Contractors extensively cleaned the buildings over the summer so that they could reopen Aug. 27 for the start of the new academic year.

Some observers have said that Brookfield's asbestos monitoring program is the most extensive in the state and one of the most extensive in the nation.

The detection limit, which was set in June by an ad-hoc committee appointed by First Selectman Martin Foncello, is 5,000 fibers per square centimeter.

If the more recent tests still show that the level of asbestos is above the detection limit, then room 1104, the art room, and adjoining rooms will be closed to staff and students, re-cleaned and re-tested over the weekend and will remain closed until the air testing meets acceptable levels.

"At this time these actions are precautionary," Superintendent James Chittum said.

"We're watching the situation closely," said Steven DeVaux, the chairman of the Board of Education. "We know that the community had demanded high standards."

"This goes to show that its good to be doing the monitoring," said Kathy Hulce, a parent who has led a grass roots drive for more than two years to improve air quality in the schools.

"I'm pleased that Dr. Granville is on top of the situation and it's being addressed," said Mrs. Hulce, referring to Mark Granville of Brooks Laboratories in Norwalk, the district's asbestos management consultant who was hired two years ago at the urging of the local grassroots organization.

On a related topic, Mr. Chittum said the district is processing a work plan to refurbish the carpeting and chairs in the auditorium in Brookfield High School, which had been contaminated by asbestos.

The cost of the work is to be paid for from \$4.2 million in funding approved by voters this summer.

Mr. DeVaux said although he initially had hoped the renovations would be completed in time for the annual Christmas concert that is held in the auditorium, it now appears that the work may not be completed until early next year.