

**ANOTHER VIEW**

The low-down on our school carpeting

By Liza Grandia

Superintendent Pritchard has vouched for the safety of the Beamer carpets. But something stinks, and it's not just the carpet.

In letters to the Superintendent and trustees August 28³¹, 2017, I warned the school district about health concerns associated with a chemical called 4-PC, and why they should be skeptical of the carpet industry's self-policed "Green Plus" Label.

Unbeknownst to me, the district commissioned secret air tests for my daughter's classroom (Room No. 22) on Sept. 5. This was after tripling the air circulation on August 31. Even with the manipulated air flow, that test showed disturbing levels of toluene, ethanol, and other chemicals. If I had known of or seen the test, I would have immediately pointed out that they didn't test for 4-PC.

4-PC or 4-phenylcyclohexane is the chemical responsible for the acrid smell of new carpet. It's a byproduct of the styrenebutadiene latex to bind fibers to backing.

Like other chemicals in the U.S, 4-PC was not tested for safety before the carpet industry began producing it. It was one of the 62,000 chemicals in commerce that Congress grand-fathered into law in 1976 without even basic toxicity testing.

So how do we know 4-PC might be a problem?

In 1987-88, the Environmental Protection Agency installed new carpet at its DC headquarters. As the rugs rolled out, roughly 600 staff and scientists — about a fifth of the workforce — fell ill. Of those, about sixty people became so hypersensitized that they could not return to work in the building.

Investigations showed the common denominator for the sickened EPA workers was exposure to elevated levels of 4-PC. After two years of organizing, reams of data and lawsuits, the scientists' union Local 2050 finally convinced management to remove the carpet. EPA no longer buys carpet containing 4-PC. But the carpet industry can still sell carpets to school districts with 4-PC.

From EPA data, we know that 4-PC levels are highest right after carpet

installation, but then drop slowly and level out to a chronic low dose. Even though tests that Superintendent Pritchard secretly commissioned in January 2018 found 4-PC levels lower than the carpet industry's voluntary standard, the district cannot tell us to how much 4-PC children were exposed in August when the school carpets really reeked.

In 1991, EPA scientists recommended their agency set a regulatory level for 4-PC at less than 10 parts per billion. The carpet industry countered with voluntary proposal to self-police at 300 parts per million. You don't have to be a mathematician to note the difference.

That's how the "green label" was born in 1992. It was a marketing gimmick of the carpet industry to avoid regulation and induce consumers and institutions to trust that the actual roll they buy has been thoroughly tested and is safe. This could not be further from the truth.

On Dec. 14, I gave a summary and copies of a shocking report released by the Healthy Building Network in October 2017 called "Eliminating Toxics in Carpet" which found "green" label testing includes only one of the 44 hazardous substances that scientists discovered in carpet.

Beyond styrene (a known carcinogen linked to leukemias and lymphomas), these included: mercury, arsenic and lead from the incinerator fly ash used as carpet fillers; triclosan, an endocrine disruptor banned since 2016 in personal care products; PFAs and PFOAs ("forever chemicals") for stain resistance that are linked with everything from testicular cancer to thyroid problems; flame retardants — known to cause neurodevelopment delay; and PVC, phthalates (plasticizers), BPA, and other known endocrine disruptors that can disrupt children's hormonal systems. Yet, the district has chosen to trust the word of the carpet industry over parent testimonies and the research of independent scientists. The number of sickened people is now in the double digits.

The truly sad thing is that the natural linoleum flooring alternative would save the district money.

If the carpet is safe, then why did the district deny my request for a sample removed from Room No. 22 to have it tested by independent university scientists for free? Instead, like the Grinch on Christmas eve, DFS Flooring (the same company that installed the carpet) carted away every last thread in the dead of night on Jan. 20.

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