

Hartford Budget Proposal Puts PCB Cleanup at \$4M

By **Vanessa de la Torre**

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HARTFORD — The city estimates that clearing the contamination at Clark Elementary School could cost \$4 million, a rough guess included in a draft of Hartford's capital improvement plans.

The 2015-16 proposal indicates that the state would fund some of the PCB cleanup. Mayor **Pedro Segarra** is set to present his municipal budget next month to the city council, which usually votes on the annual spending plan and capital projects in late May.

Sal Salafia, a program manager with ARCADIS/O&G, which administers Hartford's school construction program, stressed Monday that the \$4 million for the Clark remediation is a "ballpark" figure that could easily change.

"It's very difficult to put a price tag on it," Salafia said.

That estimate does not include the approximately \$1 million for Clark's fire protection system, he said, a partially state-funded project that was put on hold this winter after pre-installation testing revealed that the school's paint was contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls. Sprinkler piping was going to be installed through painted walls.

Additional tests found airborne PCBs at concentrations higher than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's recommended exposure for schoolchildren. The toxic chemicals — used widely in a range of commercial products before a U.S. ban in the late 1970s — also turned up in the school's air handling system and in caulk at levels up to 1,940 times the federal limit, requiring intervention by the EPA.

With significant PCB contamination in the caulk, it's possible that the chemicals have permeated nearby surfaces in the 104,000-square-foot North End building, according to a recent report from district consultant Eagle Environmental.

The city's school building committee is expected to begin soliciting bids from firms that specialize in PCB removal. District administrators said it could be a year before Clark, constructed in 1971, is reopened to the students and staff who were relocated to other city schools in January.

Meanwhile, the district's environmental consultants said Monday they are developing a "pilot study" that will involve isolating a southern section of the Clark building to figure out, in consultation with the EPA, which remediation techniques might be effective in the school. It's unclear how long that process will take, they said.

The goal is finding an approach that will "get the air levels to an acceptable level," said Ross Hartman of JM

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