

Schools to comply with renewed asbestos search

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Efforts several years ago to rid Farmington school buildings of asbestos problems were effective, an official said, but a recent federal order is requiring schools throughout the country to check the problem again.

"It is our intent to comply and have all of it gone," said Michael Flanagan, deputy superintendent for Farmington schools. "I frankly think we don't have any in the district."

The only area of concern, he said, may be around piping insulation.

School districts throughout the country have until fall 1988 to check their buildings for further asbestos and come up with a plan for making their buildings safe, according to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency mandate that became effective in December.

The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, or AHERA, states that if problems are found, the district must begin implementing the plan by July 1989.

THE ASBESTOS mandate was discussed recently at a Farmington Board of Education meeting, when trustee Helen Prutow raised the issue after discussing it with fellow trustees on the Oakland Schools board. Prutow warned Farmington trustees the mandate could cost the district money, even if asbestos is not a problem.

"Costs are a concern," she said, adding that all the inspections and plan work must be done by contractors approved and licensed by the EPA.

Prutow said at the county level, the intermediate district is already looking at more than \$1 million in asbestos containment costs for only two buildings.

Bill DeLiefde, asbestos coordinator for the Michigan Department of Public Health,

said that not only must inspectors and management planners be EPA-approved, but also project designers, contractors and the asbestos contract workers.

"The inspection and management time are pretty unrealistic," he said.

THERE ARE currently only five EPA-approved inspectors/management planners in the state of Michigan to cover all the districts. "There's a shortage (of approved contractors), no competition and unrealistically high prices," he added.

Not only will these EPA approvals slow down the process, DeLiefde said, but his department must also develop its own, legislatively approved plan that will give guidelines for reviewing plans from individual school districts by this fall. His department is still working on the plan, he said.

The state health department is responsible for working with the state's 570 school districts on individual reports due this fall,

but DeLiefde said the EPA will maintain responsibility for enforcing the plans.

Asbestos is a fibrous insulating material that has been linked to various lung diseases and cancer. The material was used in building construction because of its fire resistance and strength and because it is lightweight.

The AHERA mandate is a follow-up to the 1987 Congressional "Asbestos in School Rule." It forced districts to address "friable" forms of asbestos, which can be "crumbled, crushed or pulverized," DeLiefde said.

Congress decided too many schools ignored this thing and told the EPA to do it again," he added.

AHERA is more specific, addressing all types of asbestos. All school buildings from kindergarten through grade 12, in both public and private schools are affected, he said. DeLiefde said he is concerned that dis-

tricts will make the effort to remove all asbestos to "get rid of the problem once and for all."

"There are a lot of people that say asbestos has to be removed. It does not," he said. "Removal should be one of the last resorts. The consequences of improper removal is that exposure (level) is higher after an abatement than before."

In Farmington, asbestos was discovered in the early 1980s in boiler rooms and around piping in 18 of the district's 24 buildings. The asbestos was "encapsulated" — making it a solid and preventing it from becoming airborne. Very little of it was actually removed.

Several districts in Michigan joined a class action suit in 1985 against asbestos producers and suppliers to recover their costs. Farmington officials decided not to join in the suit, estimating it would have cost more than the \$7,000 spent in addressing the asbestos problems.

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Assessments up 12-15 percent

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ber board of review. Board members are George Dorn, Gordon Meyers and Dorothy Jeffers.

The review board's official hearing dates are March 14-18. Additional hearing dates will be scheduled, if necessary. Hearing appointments can be made after notices are mailed in early March. Appointments must be made by March 16. Appeals also can be made in writing. "You should be able to show that it (assessment) is more than 50 percent of market value," Babb said.

As was last year, this year and probably will be next year, the culprit for increased assessments is the raging housing sales market. "The market has gone up, pure and simple. The market for the past two years has gone up and up dramatically," Babb said.

They (property owners) can expect an increase next year if the market continues in 1988 at its present levels," he added. "The only thing that would prevent it from going up would be a major recession in the housing market."

Last year, residential property assessments increased an average 6 percent.

The assessment process determines the true cash value of property for the purpose of calculating property taxes. City, school and

county tax rates are levied against the assessed value of property. An assessment is generally 50 percent of "the usual selling price" of a house.

The assessor does not create market value. He reacts to the market. Assessments are a reflection of that market," Babb said.

TO DETERMINE assessments, Babb used a 24-month sales study that includes the last three quarters of 1985, all of 1986 and the first quarter of 1987.

"Especially 1986 and 1987, we have seen a tremendous growth in residential value. And it's catching up to us. We're looking at the periods of transition in the market falling off the study," Babb said.

Babb used 182 separate sales studies within the 24-month period to determine property assessments. The 24-month study period no longer includes those months prior to 1985 "when the market wasn't going up as fast," Babb said.

"If Babb had used a 12-month in-

stead of the 24-month study, assessments would have been even higher because the latest 12 months of the housing market raged. "I would have increases of 34 percent generally across the board," he said. "The assessor is going to use what's better for the taxpayer."

When analyzing the sales study, Babb considers all recorded sales. He also looks for unusual sales, whatever the reason, and sales that are contrary to established pattern. He takes out those sales that give an unusual weight to the study.

"The sales study is a sample. We're comparing assessments vs. sales to see where the level will be. We try to make sure we're looking at the usual selling price," Babb said.

Hills' decree pledges support to equality

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Farmington Hills council members lauded Dolan's resolution. "I think Mrs. Dolan's resolution is just wonderful and I support it 100 percent," councilwoman Jean Fox said.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said recent incidents should be condemned and that residents have been making efforts and strides in integrating neighborhoods.

"The community is not as racist" as Willis' comments at the cultural meeting "would point out," Vagnozzi said. Those comments "condemned the entire community."

OTHER COUNCIL members also disagreed with Willis' assessment. The city and former Farmington Township, Fox said, has a long, long dedication to helping people of all races.

Fox referred to the long family history of the late Pete Hullin, known as "Pete the TV Man," as an example of the community's openness and dedication to all races.

Hullin's ancestors, Fox said, traveled to then-Farmington Township via the underground railroad to escape slavery before the Civil War.

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