

Miller Place Union Free School District

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May 2, 2019

RE: Miller Place High School Gym Floor Update

Good Afternoon Parents, Guardians and Staff,

This message is being sent to you in an effort to keep you updated on the status of the emergency situation that necessitated the closure of the High School gymnasium, and as a follow up to my email to you on Sunday afternoon. At this time, the District may not be able to answer all of your questions—as there are still questions we are seeking answers to—but we can share the following:

When was this synthetic floor installed and why was it covered with wood?

To the best of our knowledge, and as a result of research conducted this week, the synthetic floor was originally installed when the building was built in the early 1970's as a junior high school. During the 1990-91 school year, a wood floor was installed over the synthetic floor, as the building was now going to be used as a high school. Please remember, Miller Place School District was originally an elementary school district with our students attending Port Jefferson School District for secondary education.

How did we know to test the floor for mercury vapors?

In early 2019, a New Jersey school district detected mercury in their gym floors. In mid-April 2019, a Long Island school district determined their synthetic gym floor was leaching mercury vapors and began the process of removing the floor over the spring recess vacation period. During the removal process, a contractor with knowledge of our current high school gymnasium floor (which is raised due to an old floor beneath it), contacted the District to discuss the possibility that our floor—that had been covered up 27-28 years ago—may be the same type of synthetic floor.

Based on this information, which was Wednesday, April 24, 2019, the District arranged for air sampling of the gymnasium to be immediately done on Thursday afternoon, April 25, 2019. We were advised on Thursday evening that various air samples were positive for mercury vapors, and immediately closed the gymnasium for access to all individuals – staff and students.

What are the mercury vapor levels?

Without going into complicated formulas and statistics, the initial readings were approximately 99% below the OSHA ceiling limit standard for workplace safety. The key factor in the OSHA regulations is a mercury level of “50”. Our readings were below “1.” Information regarding OSHA mercury exposure can be obtained at the following website:

https://www.osha.gov/Publications/mercuryexposure_fluorescentbulbs_factsheet.html

If the mercury vapors were safe according to OSHA standards, why did you close the gymnasium?

Out of an abundance of caution. Although mercury exists in our natural environment, there is no Federal or New York State data regarding student safety in a school setting.

What is the status now?

The gymnasium remains contained and closed with no access to anyone other than the professionals assisting the District with this emergency.

The gymnasium continues to undergo “negative air pressure treatment” which is keeping it “cleaner” from mercury vapors. Continuous air testing is being conducted in the gymnasium and surrounding areas.

Athletic team practices, matches and games that were scheduled in the gymnasium have been relocated. Physical Education classes are being conducted in alternative settings inside and outside the building.

How is the District handling the emergency repairs and what will be done to remedy the situation?

The current wood floor, along with the covered up synthetic floor is going to be removed and replaced with a new wood floor. All materials removed will be disposed of according to all environmental rules and regulations. The removal will be done when classes are not in session and according to the strictest environmental guidelines available.

The District, with the support and guidance of our consultants, has filed the necessary paperwork and documents with the State Education Department to proceed with this project. We will proceed according to their guidelines, as quickly as we can, to begin and complete the removal and reconstruction of the flooring.

How much is all this going to cost?

At this time, we do not know that answer. There are still many variables that need to be determined by the professionals assisting us with this situation. Please note, we have only been aware of this situation for less than one week and we are working diligently to gather information as quickly as possible, but it takes time.

Will these emergency repairs impact the current 2018-19 budget or the proposed 2019-20 budget?

No. This emergency and the remedy, has no effect on the current or proposed budget. The repairs will be funded from the District’s unappropriated fund balance (emergency reserve) which is established for situations such as this one.

Does this type of synthetic and/or rubberized flooring exist in our other schools?

No. The District has no knowledge of any building, besides the high school gymnasium, having a buried or a sub-floor, which is synthetic or containing mercury. The Andrew Muller Primary School cafeteria floor is not a synthetic or wood floor. The Laddie A. Decker Sound Beach School gymnasium floor is a wood floor. The current North Country Road Middle School gymnasium has a wood floor, and the original gymnasium/cafeteria parquet flooring, which was installed in the 1950’s, is wood.

We will continue to keep the community updated as confirmed information becomes available. Please be cautious when reading social media posts by individuals who have no direct knowledge of this project.

Thank you for your continued patience regarding this situation and for your continued support of our school community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marianne F. Cartisano
Superintendent of Schools