



1436 U Street NW, Suite 101  
Washington, DC 20009 USA

t: 202.667.6982  
f: 202.232.2592  
w: www.ewg.org

August 25, 2015

Lauren Zeise  
Acting Director  
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment  
Post Office Box 4010  
Sacramento, CA 95812-4010

Dear Ms. Zeise:

In the last year several incidents and media reports have spotlighted possible asbestos exposure at a number of public schools in both southern and northern California.

Last year, three schools had to be closed in the Ocean View School District that serves Huntington Beach after asbestos fibers were found. The lives of 1,600 students and their families were significantly disrupted as a result, and one school, Lake View Elementary, will remain closed for the upcoming school year as asbestos removal continues. The students were dispersed to eight other schools in four school districts, costing the Ocean View district \$50,000 a week to bus the children to their temporary schools. As a result, the school district last March predicted a nearly \$16 million budget shortfall.

Recently, inspections of Hayward's schools found more than 90,000 square feet of tile made with asbestos. Roughly half of it was damaged, making it possible for asbestos fibers to become airborne. All told, asbestos-containing tiles were in almost "50 classrooms, art rooms, music rooms and offices" in 34 schools, according to a July 16 report in *The Pioneer*, the East Bay newspaper that obtained the inspection results through a Freedom of Information request last spring. More than 20,000 students attend the 34 schools.

And in August, employees and students at the University of California at Davis who install and remove audio-visual equipment from classrooms and buildings revealed that, at the direction of their superiors, they had repeatedly punctured walls that they knew almost certainly contained asbestos – without taking any of the necessary and required measures to protect students, faculty and other employees.

The 1986 federal Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, which established the current regulations governing asbestos in schools, requires all public and private schools to regularly inspect their buildings for asbestos, take appropriate abatement actions and ensure that asbestos management plans are available to parents and the public.

However, earlier this month (Aug. 6), a report in *The Washington Post* exposed the lack of information regarding asbestos inspections in schools, citing a letter sent earlier this year by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Edward Markey (D-Mass.) to all 50

governors requesting information on how their states and school districts adhere to the law.

The Washington Post confirmed that the senators received responses from all 50 governors, and, according to spokesperson for Sen. Markey, the answers signal that not every state is consistent in following the law.

Although asbestos is no longer mined in the United States, it remains legal and is responsible for up to 15,000 deaths a year. Since 1999, more than 21,000 California residents have died of asbestos-related disease, and studies show that teachers are twice as likely as the general public to die of mesothelioma, an extremely painful and rapidly fatal form of cancer that attacks the lining of the lungs, stomach and other organs.

It is incumbent on officials responsible for public education in California to take every possible step to ensure that students, faculty and support staff are safe, including from exposure to asbestos. We urge you to take immediate action to make sure that every public school and university in the state is doing all it can to eliminate the considerable risks posed by even the smallest amounts of asbestos. In addition, we urge the state to publicly disclose the details of any action plan it implements as well as the results of any and all inspections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather White".

Heather White  
Executive Director  
EWG Action Fund

cc:

The Honorable Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Christine Baker, Director  
Dept. of Industrial Relations: Dept. of Occupational Safety and Health



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Christine Baker  
Director of Industrial Relations  
Dept. of Occupational Safety and Health  
1515 Clay Street, 19th Floor  
Oakland, California 94612

Dear Ms. Baker:

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Lauren Zeise, Acting Director  
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



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August 25, 2015

The Honorable Tom Torlakson  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
1430 N Street, Suite 5602  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Superintendent Torlakson:

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Last year, three schools had to be closed in the Ocean View School District that serves Huntington Beach after asbestos fibers were found. The lives of 1,600 students and their families were significantly disrupted as a result, and one school, Lake View Elementary, will remain closed for the upcoming school year as asbestos removal continues. The students were dispersed to eight other schools in four school districts, costing the Ocean View district \$50,000 a week to bus the children to their temporary schools. As a result, the school district last March predicted a nearly \$16 million budget shortfall.

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