

Widespread Chemical Contamination Found in Somerville Municipal Headquarters

Widespread contamination by toxic chemicals and metals has been found in the municipal headquarters for the Somerville Police and Fire Departments, and employees should be protected from ongoing exposure, according to tests conducted by a company specializing in toxicology and risk assessment.

“The chemicals determined to be present in the Somerville Police and Fire Headquarters have the potential for causing various types of diseases,” said Kenneth Weinberg, Ph.D., a biochemist and pathologist, who is chief consultant for SafDoc Systems of Stoughton, Mass. Dr. Weinberg added, “This facility, at the least, needs to be vacated and thoroughly cleaned and decontaminated.”

Testing found carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and volatile organic compounds, related to diesel fuels used in the fire engines, contaminating the air inside the facility, located at 220 Washington Street, in Somerville, Mass. A complete review of the HVAC system, the transport pathways and means of preventing the diesel fuels from entering the facility needs to be performed and put into action, the report said. Hoses attached to the exhaust pipes of the fire engines did not appear to be effective, either because the system is not properly set up or because these exhaust hoses are not used consistently and correctly.

Lead contamination also was found throughout the headquarters. Safdoc recommended further evaluation to find the source of these high lead levels, since the firing range, located in the basement of the building, has not been in use for several years. Dr. Weinberg said, because these are not typical occupational exposures to toxic chemicals, efforts need to be made to eliminate the presence of these chemicals from the facility or to eliminate employee exposure to these hazardous chemicals.

In another report, Boston Environmental & Engineering Associates revealed the presence of elevated toxic mold levels, including *Stachybotrys*, in various parts of the building. Like Dr. Weinberg, Boston Environmental also found that vehicular exhaust gases entered the facility.

“Police Officers and Firefighters work in inherently dangerous occupations on a daily basis, where is the logic in arming our police officers with bullet-proof vests and our firefighters with helmets and safety equipment only to send them to work at a toxic facility,” said Stephen D’Angelo, an attorney with D’Angelo & Hashem, the Boston law firm representing a group of 60 workers who are suing the city for action to clean up the building or build a new one. “To save lives, the building needs to be closed down immediately, not when it may be politically convenient for Mayor Curtatone and Acting Chief Bradley.” D’Angelo adds, “Our public servants need, and deserve, to work in a building that doesn’t put them at an increased cancer risk.”

This latest testing comes six years after mold contamination was discovered at the facility after workers were beleaguered with a variety of illnesses, including lung infections and cancers. Recently, Somerville Fire Department Lt. Kevin Hough passed away after a battle with lung cancer. This study was conducted, pursuant to court order, to determine what toxins were present in the facility and the potential health hazards associated with them.

About Safdoc Systems:

Safdoc Systems, LLC, specializes in Environmental Health and Safety, as well as Toxicology and Risk Assessment. Dr. Kenneth Weinberg holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Pathology from Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Division of Medical and Dental Sciences as well as a Master of Science Degree in Environmental Health and Radiation Health Physics from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

About Boston Environmental & Engineering Associates

Gene Marckini, President of Boston Environmental & Engineering Associates, Inc., has been a practicing Chemical, Mechanical and Environmental Engineer for over 35 years. He is a Registered Professional Chemical Engineer in the State of Massachusetts. His professional affiliations include the past offices of President and Vice President of the Engineering Societies of New England; Member, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and American Institute of Mechanical Engineers and Board of Directors of the American Fiber Optics Association.

About D'Angelo & Hashem:

D'Angelo & Hashem, LLC, is a full-service, general practice law firm, with offices in Boston and Lawrence, Massachusetts. Stephen L. D'Angelo, a founding partner of the firm, is an accomplished litigator and business professional, and handles the firm's toxic tort, mold, civil and business litigation.

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