



Scranton School District
Northeast Scranton Intermediate School

Frequently Asked Questions
Posted February 25, 2020 (Updated March 9, 2020)

Why are the students not in the NEIS building?

The NEIS currently has a variety of building materials that contain asbestos. These materials exceed the EPA definition of “Asbestos Containing Material” (ACM) because they exceed 1%. There are also areas, in the 1906 wing of the building that are very close to this limit. A licensed inspector has assessed all of these materials and identified 19 areas that have asbestos and are significantly damaged and in need of immediate repair or stabilization. The abatement contractor has indicated that 80% of these areas can be addressed in about 2 weeks. The remaining areas will require more extensive repair and may be isolated. Additionally, Cocciardi has questions about ventilation systems. Some areas within the ducts of some systems contain ACM. These systems are being evaluated and should be assessed within this same two week period.

Update (March 9): Subsequent to inspections, ACM in friable form, has been identified in the ventilation systems. A potential plan to re-occupy the 1931 side of the building is under development and the school board has funded this effort; however, a re-occupancy date remains uncertain.

When can the students pick-up their personal belongings (e.g. backpacks, notebooks, coats, etc.)? When will teachers be able to get their materials?

Due to the unknown presence of asbestos fibers within dust, samples are currently being collected of various surfaces. Based on these results, we will make a recommendation to the District as to the process for retrieval. US EPA has provided guidance on some similar situations, which will be followed. Results should be available by Friday, February 28th at which time the information will be communicated.

Update (March 9): These materials have been cleared/returned. The district is in the process of distributing other materials from classrooms in the building. These include teachers’ materials, supplies and belongings.

Are the other schools that students were relocated to less dangerous than Northeast Intermediate?

We are currently reviewing NEIS due to the displacement of students. Cocciardi is however conducting surveillance inspections at the other schools along with District personnel. As these inspections occur, any remediation actions required or previously recommended but not acted upon, will be addressed by the Administration.

It is expected that these inspections for all 13 schools known to have ACM will be completed by March 2nd.

Update (March 9): Cocciardi completed a review of all schools known to contain ACM. These reviews did not identify any immediate concerns (for example, concerns that would warrant relocating students or restricting occupancy in parts of the building). Further explanation is provided below.

How do we know the schools where the former NEIS students were moved to are safer than NEIS?

NEIS students were moved to the South Scranton Intermediate School and West Scranton Intermediate School. Environmental consultants for the District (COCCIARDI ASSOCIATES) reviewed these sites on February 25, and confirmed that asbestos containing materials with the potential for significant damage or exposure were not present in either school. Additional emergent environmental health issues were not noted. Air samples previously collected for asbestos were clear at both locations, which do not hold the potential for exposure of NEIS. Asbestos is present at South and requires ongoing abatement, management and inspection. At the West Scranton Intermediate School, there are very small quantities of ACM and these are in non-friable condition.

What is the status of Willard Elementary School?

The Willard Elementary School was reviewed by the environmental consultants on February 25. Asbestos is present and requires management, however; does not present the potential for significant exposure at this time (e.g. friable asbestos is not found within air handling systems). Air samples previously collected have documented clear levels of asbestos at this location. Consultants have recommended ongoing abatement actions, and 6 month inspections of the materials that are present to confirm condition.

Have the ventilation systems been examined at the cleared schools? Has the dust been tested? If not, how are we confident that they are safe for occupancy?

The environmental consultants have reviewed schools that have been prioritized by the district and previous professionals. (See Above) All abatement activities have been cleared according to EPA criteria. Significantly damaged asbestos has not been identified in ventilation systems or other areas of the schools examined presenting exposure concerns. The consultants are in the process of reviewing ALL schools for emergent environmental concerns, and a report of findings will be authored. The district is in the process of soliciting professional environmental consultation services for ongoing consultation.

Update (March 9): All schools have been reviewed and are acceptable for occupancy.

Can someone address the “significant damaged” tiles in the South Intermediate School cafeteria, and are all the AHERA items 1-4 addressed across the district in the different schools?

The significantly damaged “floor tiles at South Intermediate School” were reviewed by DATOM (asbestos licensed) personnel and found to be surface cracks covered with wax. This does not present an immediate concern, however, will be addressed in concert with other remedial efforts. All AHERA priorities are being reviewed and summer work is being specified across the district. Cocciardi has reviewed air sampling data for all school and concerns have not been identified.

Is duct taping pipe insulation an acceptable encapsulation?

Duct tape should be left in place if presently there. Over time it degrades due to heat, so while it may work temporarily, it is not an acceptable encapsulant.

What is the protocol for notifying parents of an abatement?

An annual notification of asbestos plans/actions is provided per AHERA and asbestos management plans including abated areas are available in each school and the district. Summer abatement plans are now being formalized for all schools with required actions. Moving forward, when environmental work is taking place in schools, the Operations Department will send a notification to the building principal, explaining the work that will be completed. The building administrator will send a One Call informing the school community.

Is dust testing going to occur at SSIS (or other schools)?

Dust testing is a tool to identify potential future exposure concerns or adequate cleaning. At NEIS, friable asbestos was identified within ventilation systems. This is not the case at other schools, and dust testing is not planned.

Why did Cocciardi proceed to test all of 1931 plaster (at NEIS), when the 2019 AHERA report contained testing of the plaster?

The US EPA identified insufficient testing was performed and additional tests were needed for AHERA compliance. The district complied with the EPA statements on the testing.

If I was a past student at NEIS, what was my exposure?

There is no ongoing concern at this location. The school district, in concert with its environmental consultants and appropriate health authorities, are investigating this question.

Wouldn't air tests reveal asbestos fiber in discharges from heating systems?

AHERA only requires air test subsequent to abatement activities, to ensure appropriate clean-up has occurred. A competent evaluation performed by a licensed credentialed professional is needed to assess any potential exposures, which would include air/dust or other samples collected as well as observations.

Will the same abundance of caution approach be applied to South (or other schools)? It looks like South has comparable problems.

Yes. The cautious approach at NEIS was warranted as friable asbestos was identified in HVAC systems. This was not found in the other locations, which remain acceptable for occupancy.

What is the specific timeframe for getting students back into Northeast?

If all permits and approvals are received, work will take approximately 30 days. However, there is no guarantee all agencies will waive current requirements or approve of this re-occupancy (e.g. US EPA; Scranton Fire Bureau; Scranton Licenses & Inspections Bureau; PA Dept. of Education).

It would be helpful if someone could explain why the TEM air quality tests conducted at Northeast Intermediate in "representative areas" on Feb. 25 with results received Feb. 26 and analyzed Feb. 27 - which revealed no airborne asbestos and were conducted "while all ventilation systems were operating" - were not detailed at the March 2 meeting and presentation?

The air sample results cited above were primarily conducted to ensure the building was safe for occupational occupancy given the aforementioned friable ACM within the HVAC systems.