

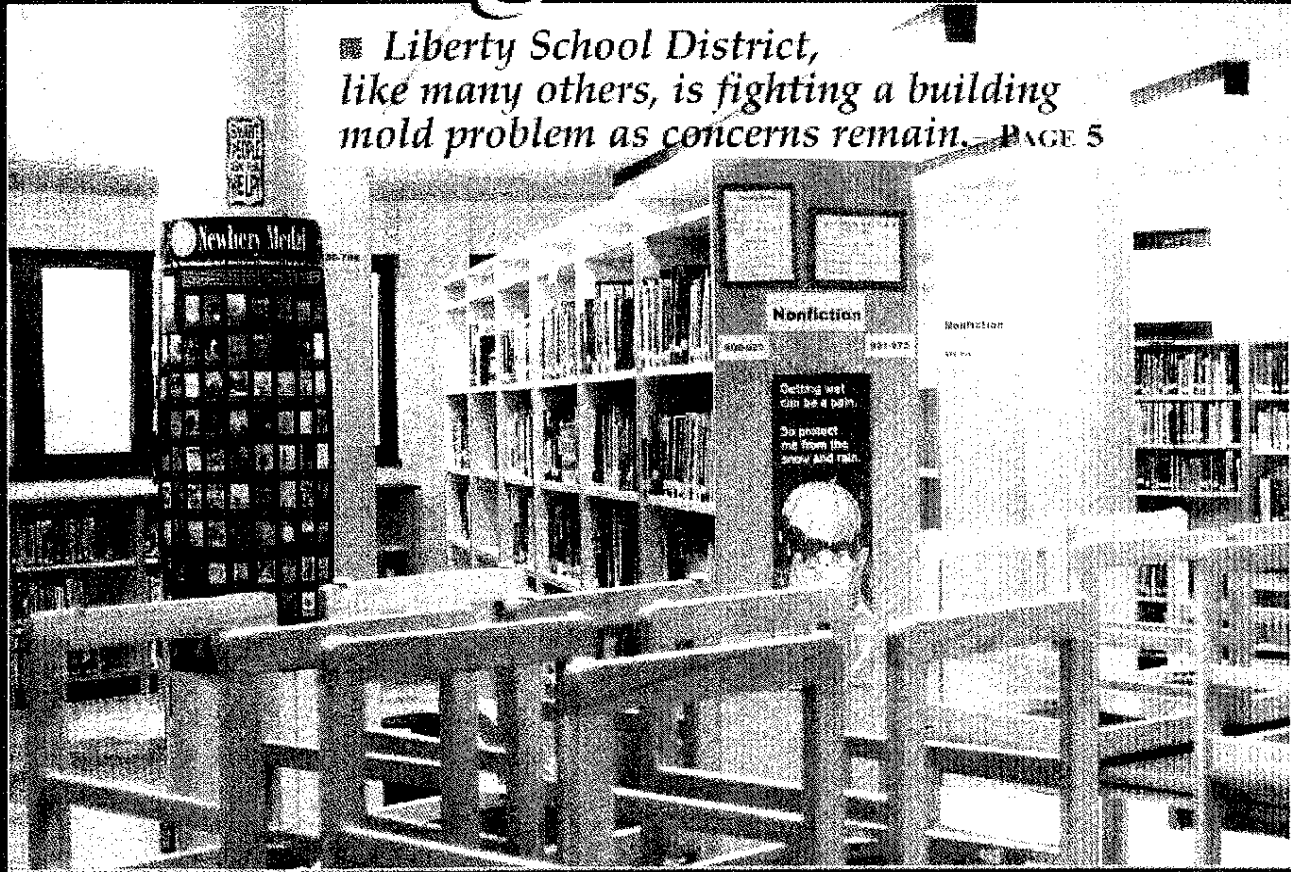
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Minding Their Mold

■ *Liberty School District, like many others, is fighting a building mold problem as concerns remain.* — PAGE 5



LEE SULLIVAN/PHOTO

THE LIBERTY Middle School library is one location where mold has been cited, it's a building that has been beset by the inflow of moisture

STORY ON PAGES 6 - 7

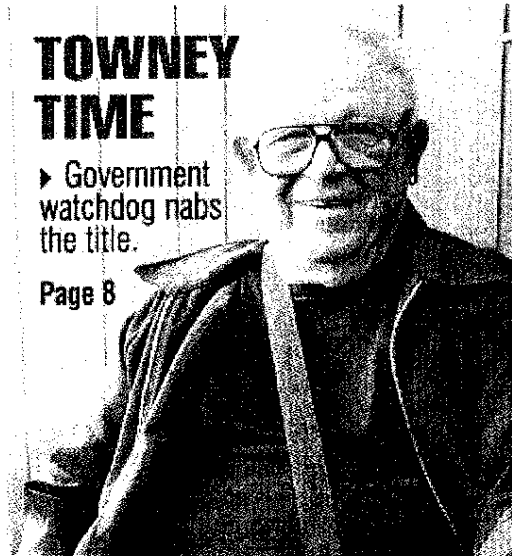


FILE PHOTO

TOWNEY TIME

► Government watchdog nabs the title.

Page 8



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY



PHOTO BY CRIER

Touching Tale

Snowy Roscoe inspires a youngster. — PAGE 9

Trees must be part of the future plan.

— PAGE 5 —

Spore Subject: Liberty Schools Tackle Mold

...an you say *Aspergillus Penicillium*? Do you know what fungal fragments or conidophores are? And, how do you decide how much of these are a good thing for your staff, your faculty and your students? These are the questions facing Liberty Central School Superintendent Lawrence Clarke and dozens of other school superintendents across the country.

Clarke is on alert against mold these days after months of complaints, at least one seriously ill employee and now a federal inspection that confirms Story photos by

Leni Santoro

The November NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) report prompted a turnout from concerned residents at a recent Liberty school board meeting. Those same residents then organized a private meeting where even more concerns about children and the exposure to mold were aired.

The Liberty district, though it has taken some steps to fix its mold problems, is facing an issue which has grown to significant levels in the nation.

Mold seeks moisture

Aspergillus and *Penicillium* are fungi. Molds and fungi occur naturally and are the result of high humidity or moisture, the right environment and the right temperature. They love to live in porous places like ceiling tiles and books, but they are also perfectly happy on a window ledge, the inside of your refrigerator or the bathroom shower curtain. They thrive in the dark, and they breed in the sun. Bleach doesn't always completely eradicate them and some molds can even withstand extreme heat. Mold spores can cause flu-like symptoms, such as sneezing, watery eyes and sore muscles.

Meanwhile, molds and fungi emit mycotoxins in an attempt to control the feeding ground, so to speak.

According to Anthony Hipport of Perfect House, a mold remediation specialist, "Mycotoxins are what molds use in a game of germ warfare against other molds."

If it's people whose immune systems are already distressed due to asthma and other similar conditions who are the most susceptible to the mycotoxins emitted by molds and fungi. This can also be said of young children whose immune systems are still developing. Some mycotoxins show immediate signs of trouble, such as sneezing, watery eyes, dry cough and accompanying throat irritation, while others can live unnoted for years before the damage is assessed.

Parents see answers

It's this very concern for children and the students in the Liberty Central School district that prompted Padma Dwyne to speak up at a recent school board meeting. She spoke in regards to the clean-up of mold and the ongoing problems of air quality. "I am concerned about kids and people working in the building ... I am concerned that they [the school] are not addressing the problem as



DAMAGE IS visible in the counselor's office in the basement of the elementary school.

deeply as it could be addressed."

And Sue Huggler added, "I don't think anybody has really addressed the effect this has had on the kids ... We have a right to come to work and send our kids into a safe environment."

Already, the Liberty School's long-time librarian is suffering serious health effects that are the result of environmental toxins. She has been out of school on disability for more than a year. District officials do not say how many others have reported what could be mold-related illnesses, but anecdotal evidence points to others who are suffering ailments that could be linked. These are adding fuel to concerns in the district about the safety of children and adults in the buildings.

But what constitutes a safe environment? Not all molds are bad thus further complicating the story. The wonder drug Penicillin is derived from a strain of *Penicillium*. Not a bad thing. However, if you happen to be one of the thousands of people who show an allergic reaction to penicillin, you may not want to get close to any of the penicillium family of molds. Other people may be allergic to nuts. There is a type of mold that loves to live in products such as nuts.

Mold and fungus take up residence anywhere that pro-

vides them with the proper environment for growth. Just like any other organism, they want a healthy, safe environment in which to settle and raise a family.

The mold and fungus, documented over the years in the Liberty Central School District, was found in just such an environment. An abundance of readily available porous materials, such as ceiling tiles, particle board shelves and the many types of paper products from boxes to books, combined with a steady stream of moisture caused by drainage issues and a leaky roof, allowed the growth of mold and fungus large enough to cause the removal of the carpeting from the Middle School library. Books that were infested with mold had to be thrown away. While some have been replaced due to budget constraints, many have not.

Fourteen years of leaks

Even before it opened in 1991, the Liberty Middle School has been beset with drainage issues and roof leaks. In fact, before the school even opened, then District Superintendent Richard Berak expressed concerns at a school board meeting about opening the school on time. His concerns then, as are Clarke's now, were cited to Story continues on next page

Liberty Middle School Mold Timeline

1988 - Voters approve building a middle school.

1991 - At a school board meeting just before opening, District Superintendent Richard Berak expresses concerns about opening the school due to leaks under the greenhouse and over the middle school library.

2001 - Middle school librarian Angela Page writes to District Superintendent Dr. Brian F. Howard suggesting that a peaked roof be put on the area over the middle school library because of excessive leaking and damage to the library contents.

2002 - Tarps are used to catch the water leakage directing the water into vestibules, which are then emptied. Ms. Page writes to custodians that attempts should be made to end nine years of leaking.

Jan. 2004 - Middle school librarian Angela Page reports a growing musty smell in the middle school library, and several ceiling tiles have fallen as well. By the end of January, the smell has become worse - several more ceiling tiles have fallen and the rug has become soaked in certain areas demanding that students be directed to avoid those areas.

March 23, 2004 - Middle school librarian finds shelf of books covered in black mold. When removing and cataloging the books, she learns for the second time. Middle school principal closes the library.

March 25, 2004 - In response to a report of adverse health conditions, Sullivan County BOCES Risk Management Department contacts Liberty Facilities Director Gary Sawyer.

March 26, 2004 - BOCES conducts an Indoor Air Quality investigation. Sampling indicates a possibility of mold sources *Aspergillus Penicillium* in the middle school library. Airborne ratio shows 7.51 near the 900 series books and 51 near the front desk. (Figures compare indoor air samples to outdoor air samples.)

April 5-12, 2004 - Removal of all damaged books and carpeting from middle school library book area.

April 20, 2004 - Library re-opens.

May 12, 2004 - BOCES reports Air-Q. C61 cassette samples indicate general air is acceptable. Recommendation to stop all leaks/drainage.

June 6, 2004 - Perfect House (mold remediation specialist), through a request

by Teachers Association and middle school librarian, review the BOCES report. States that although the sample of 5/12/04 indicated lower levels of fungal growth, levels are still unacceptable.

July 27, 2004 - At the request of the school, Comrade Associates perform limited fungal investigation (limited to genus only) in the middle school library. Air samples show *Aspergillus Penicillium* samples are slightly higher than outdoor air. Dust samples from carpeting show predominant mold species were *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus Niger*. Recommends that airborn samples be taken periodically over the coming year.

Nov. 8, 2004 - National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) receives request from Liberty Elementary Faculty Association for a Health Hazard evaluation.

May 10, 2005 - District Superintendent Lawrence Clarke requests same for middle and high schools.

May/June, 2005 - District approves \$275,000 bond proposal to mitigate water infiltration issues at the Liberty Middle School.

June 16, 2005 - NIOSH conducts "walk-through" of unoccupied rooms in

all three Liberty Central School District buildings using observational assessment tools. Did not conduct air sampling for mold in any of the schools. Did take sample of possible mold found in stairwell near exit six in the Middle School.

June 16, 2005 - Conducted exit interview with Mr. Clarke, the business administrator and the director of facilities. Interview included a briefing on the final report and its recommendations as well as possible solutions to problem areas.

Nov. 2005 - NIOSH releases its report. Copies are sent to all interested parties. District Superintendent Clarke is requested to physically post the report for 30 days. Mr. Clarke posts the report on the school Web site. Copies are available through the Web site and also through administrative offices.

Dec. 12, 2005 - Liberty Central School Board meeting. Report given by Mr. Sawyer on remediation progress. Also on the agenda: Approval of Disability Retirement Application brought by Teacher's Retirement Association. At this time parents, teachers, staff, union representatives and students attempt to voice concerns regarding the remediation of mold in the buildings.

continued from previous page

leaks in the middle school library. The library sits under a flat roof with a greenhouse (no longer in use) above it. Break's concerns were justified as 14 years of leaks and mold damage has shown.

Beginning with the closing of the middle school library for a month in March of 2004, there have been assessment reports, lab tests and air quality tests requested from BOCES as well as an outside agency, Camroden Associates, and finally a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) assessment of the situation. There has been on-going remediation work done in all three Liberty Central School District buildings since 2004, and the problem is not gone yet.

As part of the district's concern for a solution, in Spring of 2005, Liberty School District residents approved Proposition No. 2, a \$375,000 renovation project for the middle school that "includes repairs to the library roof, the connecting corridors between the middle and high school, the north side of the middle school classroom wing, and other areas of [moisture] infiltration as described in the report made by Ashley-McGrave Architects dated November 16, 2004." The work is currently being put out for bid with the repair work beginning sometime in the spring of 2006.

In addition, said District Superintendent Clarke, "We are considering hiring an industrial hygienist. What we're looking for, more than just having the expertise and overseeing it, [is] somebody who can carry us all the way through to the execution and then can sign off because we know it's all been done correctly."

A nation-wide problem

The Liberty Central School District is not alone in its battle against moisture and mold. Schools across the nation are spending not just thousands, but sometimes millions of dollars in clean-up efforts and reconstruction.

Experts have said they are dealing with such issues constantly. Estimates say that across the nation some 7,500 schools have mold problems - that's about 10 percent of schools in the U.S.

As in the case of the Liberty Elementary School building (built 100 years ago), oftentimes it is the age of the school that creates a problem. The addition of interior walls, the rearrangement of rooms and/or the repositioning of rooms change the original design purposes of the builders. Such is the case of the crew room in the basement of the elementary school that is now used for a counseling room and which prompted the initial NIOSH report request.

A building is designed to encourage air flow and good air quality; when you change the design, you also change the air flow capacity and the indoor air environment.

In cases like the Liberty Middle School and the High School, which are relatively new structures, the problem is also one of design. Drainage issues, roof quality and the very cinder blocks that make up the walls can all lead to the encouragement of mold growth. Highly insulated, they were built to keep heat in and cold air out. At the time, this was thought to be a good thing, but now without adequate and well-maintained air filtration systems they are also holding in moisture, and moisture can lead to mold.

Getting hold on mold

So how much mold is a problem and who determines this?

On the federal level, the Toxic Mold Protection Act-H.R. 1268, otherwise known as the Melina Bill introduced in 2003, contains as part of its research and reporting clause that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health shall, "undertake a comprehensive study of indoor mold growth and toxic mold." This includes, "3. the potential dangers of indoor mold growth; 4. minimum levels of exposure at which mold growth is harmful to human health and 5. the hazards of mold remediation."

In addition, the act also provides for "Hazard Assistance ... grants for remediation of public buildings and severely impacted homes ... tax credit for toxic mold inspection and remediation" and "... national toxic mold insurance program."

For its part, New York State has recently created the Toxic Mold Task Force. Signed into law in August of 2005, S1771-B follows the lead of California and several other states by authorizing a task force to be set up to investigate the cause and effect of mold and mycotoxins, as well as to establish acceptable levels.

Who's in charge

Meanwhile, is there any agency that can come in and investigate conditions in a school building and then hold a school district accountable for cleanup and remediation? "I don't believe so," said Clarke. "I think that the closest is NIOSH because they have federal status and because the process and the procedures they use are industry standards that do exist, and they are consistent with them and they have oversight/recommendation powers."

But legally, a school district is not bound by the findings in a NIOSH report.

"I would have to say, no," agreed Clarke and then went on to add, "In terms of our attitude here in the district, we welcomed them and brought them in and welcomed their review because we wanted the information and data they would provide us. We also wanted someone neutral and unbiased to say what do we have and what recommendations they could make."

Clarke was referring to November 2004, when NIOSH conducted a "walk-through assessment" of all three Liberty Central School District buildings. This came about when the Liberty Elementary Faculty Association requested that NIOSH do a Health Hazard evaluation of the elementary school. Later on, additional evaluations of the middle and high schools were requested by Clarke.

While NIOSH personnel conducted indoor air quality tests for temperature, humidity and CO₂, lacking from the report were indoor air mold testing results, though a tap sampling of the area behind the stairwell, well mean east six in the middle school, was done. A copy of the Liberty Central School District NIOSH Report can be seen by going to the school's Web site.

While NIOSH may not have enforcement authority, the State Education Department can, in certain circumstances, force a district's hand when it comes to mold.

A serious issue

According to Charles Szuberla, coordinator for facilities and management for the SED, the Commissioner of Education can order measures to be taken when conditions are considered unsafe.

"Mold," said Szuberla, "is taken seriously today." Health issues, including asthma among students, have heightened the concern over mold in schools, and many schools have had to deal with the occurrence of mold.

Szuberla did not have specifics about the Liberty case, but he did say he feels the State Education Department facilities staff has helped a lot of schools deal with the problem.

Bottom line, he said, school officials must first take steps to stop the water from entering the buildings and then clean up and remove the materials. Mold lives in materials, Szuberla said.

Tomie Crowe Staff member Barbara Goff contributed to this report.

BECOME INFORMED

School mold and mold in general has increasingly become a problem across the country. What can a parent do? Become informed. Find out what is going on in your district. Get involved and stay involved. Take the right conditions and time for mold and fungi to develop. To set up house and to begin taking over. Once it's there, it can take even longer to find all of it and remove it. Most important is to remedy the problems that started the chain of events to begin with.

The taxpayers of the Liberty School District have set aside \$375,000 to remediate no-share problems at the Middle School. Faculty, staff and students are being asked to report signs of any symptoms to the school nurse or to the school administrators.

The remediation has begun, but it has only just begun. It is expected to take a great effort on the part of school administrators, staff, faculty and parents to ensure a safe and healthy school environment.

For more information, visit the Liberty Central School web site at <http://www.libertyk12.org/>, or call your school administrator to find out what to look for and/or how to report signs of possible mold allergies. Additional information, as well as links to rights with regards of mold and fungi, can be found at School Mold help at <http://schoolmoldhelp.org/>.

MOLD IN CYBERSPACE

Web sites about mold are almost as plentiful as mold itself. Nonetheless, here are some odds we found helpful:

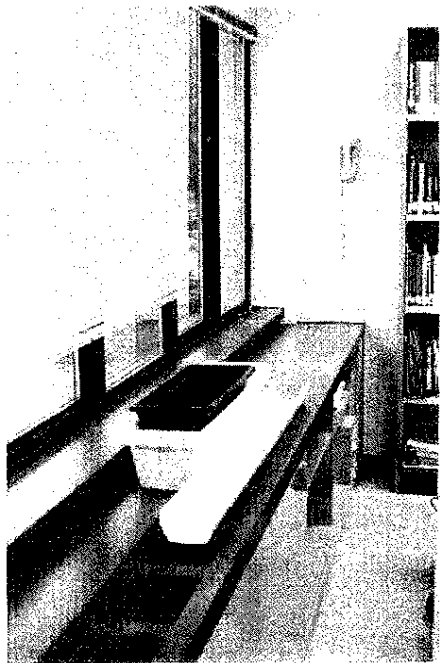
1. Photos and explanations of different types of mold <http://www.moldmatters.com/>
2. Sick Building Syndrome <http://www.doctorfungus.org/index.htm>
3. New York State Toxic Mold Task Force Bill # A04677B <http://public.legis.state.ny.us/menuqell.cgi>
4. Toxic Mold Protection Act - Melina Bill http://www.house.gov/congress/60th_Bill.pdf and <http://www.house.gov/congress/mold.htm>
5. US EPA Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/index.html>
6. US EPA Mold Remediation in Schools <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/mold/remediation.html>
7. Center for Disease Control Questions and Answers on Staphylococcus maritimus and other molds <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airto/HAHn/mold/staphy.htm#Q4>
8. School Mold Help <http://schoolmoldhelp.org/>
9. Information on Aspergillus <http://www.mold-help.org/content/view/full/406>
10. Copy of NIOSH report can be found here <http://www.libertyk12.org/>

MANY MOLDS

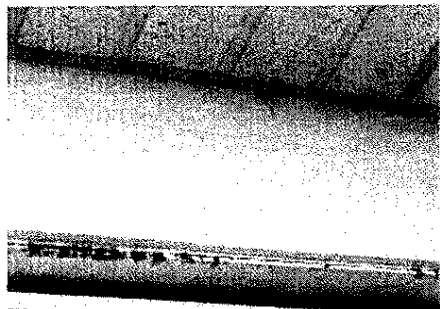
These are the types of mold and fungi that were found in the Liberty Middle and High Schools in two reports in 2004. Given is the type of mold and fungi and the report in which it was listed.

Alternaria	BOCES 3/04*
Ascomycetes	Camroden 8/04*
Aspergillus	Camroden 8/04
Aspergillus niger	Camroden 8/04
Dematiomycetes	Camroden 8/04
Dactylospora	Camroden 8/04
Dicellaea	Camroden 8/04
Cladophora	Camroden 8/04
Chaetomium	BOCES 3/04
Cucurbitaria	Camroden 8/04
Epicoccum	Camroden 8/04
Hyaline fragments	BOCES 3/04
Mucor	Camroden 8/04
Myrmecocystes	Camroden 8/04
Penicillium	Camroden 8/04
Periconia	Camroden 8/04
Pithecomyces	Camroden 8/04
Polythidium	Camroden 8/04
Pyricularia	Camroden 8/04
Smutts	Camroden 8/04
Tarula	Camroden 8/04
Ulocladium	Camroden 8/04

The BOCES report was done at the request of Liberty district officials. Camroden refers to a report given by one person from Camroden Associates based in Westchester, NY also at the district's request.



PLANTERS were used to catch water in the middle school library computer area.



A WINDOW in the middle school library computer area shows moisture damage.

Tomie Crowe Staff member Barbara Goff contributed to this report.