

Education goes on near Plastimet

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Recess and outdoor gym class will go on as usual at six Hamilton Board of Education schools near the Plastimet fire site.

Board officials say they have been advised by the regional health department that no specific precautions are necessary for children playing in the schoolyards.

“None of our playground activities have been curtailed and just normal precautions in association with the safety of our children are employed,” said William Urey, co-ordinator of occupational health and safety for the board.

However, the board did issue reminders to school cleaning staff about taking the appropriate precautions in dealing with dirty air filters or areas with a buildup of soot and dust.

“We have not changed anything. We will go outside in the good weather as frequently as we used to,” said Clarke Johnson, principal at Centennial school.

In the aftermath of the July 9 fire, the health department advised parents not to let children play in grass where there was visible soot from the fire.

That caution was lifted about a week later when the department said fresh tests for toxic dioxin showed levels had returned to normal background levels. The advice then was simply to follow good hygienic practices, making sure children wash their hands after playing in the dirt.

“The same information we gave to homeowners in the area as far as (children) playing in the backyard would apply to the schools,” said Robert Hall, acting director of environmental health at the regional health department.

“The levels of contamination that we were originally concerned with (about grass) do not exist anymore. That's why we lifted the restriction of children playing in the yards. But make sure children wash their hands when they come in before they eat.”

But that advice would apply regardless of the fire, he said.

The department said much of the dioxin that showed up in the initial tests would have been broken down by the sun, washed away by rain or absorbed into the soil.

Urey said there had been inquiries from union officials representing teachers and custodial staff. Custodians were advised that normal precautions in dealing with dirt and soot would

be sufficient, such as washing surfaces with warm water and wearing rubber gloves.

Meanwhile, on the fire site itself, Dave DuBois of Golder Associates reports that the last of the structural steel was removed last week.

He said the company, which is overseeing the cleanup, is now preparing to move on to the next stage, removing contaminated fire ash and waste. Waste samples from the site are being analysed to determine how and where they can be disposed of.

The results are expected later this week and once the waste content is known, Golder will hire a contractor to handle that stage of the cleanup.

DuBois said the company is awaiting a second insurance payment and remains concerned about getting paid for its work. For several days the company has heard the money would be released today or tomorrow.

The first instalment was for \$200,000 and a Ministry of Environment and Energy official has said much more will be required.

The cleanup is continuing under the control of Plastimet, but it is now being done under a strict field order issued by the ministry. That order sets out specific deadlines that must be met.

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