

Preventing Exposure to PCBs in Caulking Material



PCBs are found in high levels in building caulk

Caulk containing high levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) has been found in many schools and other buildings built or remodeled before 1978. Because PCBs can migrate from the caulk into air, dust, surrounding building materials, and soil, EPA is concerned about potential PCB exposure to building occupants.

Health impacts of PCB exposure

PCBs are man-made toxic chemicals that persist in the environment and bioaccumulate in animals and humans. PCBs were manufactured in the United States between 1950 and 1978, before their manufacture was banned by Congress due to concerns about their potential for adverse effects on human health and the environment. Exposure to PCBs can affect the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system, and endocrine system. In humans, PCBs are potentially cancer-causing.

Protect children and other building occupants

The preventive steps described below can help reduce exposure to PCBs in caulk until it can be removed.

- Improve ventilation and add exhaust fans. Clean air ducts.
- Clean frequently to reduce dust and residue inside buildings.
- Use a wet or damp cloth or mop to clean surfaces.
- Use vacuums with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- Do not sweep with dry brooms and minimize the use of dusters.
- Wash hands with soap and water after cleaning and before eating or drinking, and wash children's toys often.

Test for PCBs in buildings built between 1950 and 1978

If school administrators and building owners are concerned about exposure to PCBs and wish to supplement these steps, EPA recommends testing to determine if PCB levels in the air exceed EPA's suggested public health levels. If testing reveals PCB levels above these levels, schools should be especially vigilant in implementing and monitoring practices to minimize exposures.

Caulk that is peeling or deteriorating may be tested to determine its PCB content. If PCBs are found in the air, EPA will assist in developing a plan to reduce exposure and manage the caulk. Your EPA regional PCB coordinator can direct you to a PCB testing lab; see the back cover for more information.

PCBs were not added to caulk after 1978. Therefore, in general, schools built after 1978 do not contain PCBs in caulk.

Avoid exposure to PCBs in building caulk

Caulk that is peeling, brittle, cracking, or deteriorating visibly in some way may have the highest potential for creating dust. In addition to inhalation from PCBs in the air or dust, exposure may occur when a person comes in contact with the caulk and any surrounding porous materials into which the PCBs may have been released (e.g., brick, concrete, wood). Exposure may also occur through contact with PCB-contaminated soil adjacent to buildings. Soil may become contaminated with PCBs when caulk weathers.

Protections during removals, renovations

Schools, building owners, and daycare providers in public and commercial buildings need to follow PCB-safe renovation practices to minimize potential exposures resulting from renovations to workers, teachers, and children.

It is important to manage the removal in a way that minimizes workers' exposure to the PCBs (e.g., use protective clothing such as facemasks, gloves, etc.) and prevents the release of PCBs into the environment. The work practices described below can help reduce exposure to PCBs in caulk until it can be removed.

In addition to the safeguards mentioned above:

- Wear appropriate protective clothing when conducting cleanup activities.
- Dispose of all cleanup materials (mops, rags, filters, water, etc.) in accordance with all federal, state, and county regulations.
- For caulk used on windows, walls, columns, and other vertical structures that people may come into contact with, use heavy-duty plastic and tape to contain the area so that caulk or dust and debris from the surrounding masonry do not escape. The plastic should cover the caulk and surrounding areas of masonry.

EPA is helping to address the issue of PCBs in caulk

EPA is conducting research on how the public is exposed to PCBs in caulk and on the best approaches for reducing exposure and potential risks associated with PCBs in caulk. Where PCBs have been found in caulk, EPA is committed to helping schools and communities enact plans to reduce exposure. Please contact your regional PCB coordinator at 888-835-5372 for help with assessing contamination and exposure and developing cleanup plans.

Summary

EPA is particularly concerned when PCBs are present during renovation or remodeling activities because these activities increase the potential likelihood of exposure.

- Keep people out of areas where cracked or peeling caulk is evident such as in playgrounds and near steps.
- Promote safe work practices during renovation activities.
- Take actions to safely remove caulk during PCB removal or renovation projects and undertake and complete the work in a timely fashion.

Reducing Potential Exposures to PCBs from Caulk in Schools and Other Buildings

Points to Remember

- 1 EPA is concerned about potential exposure to PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in caulk found in older schools and buildings. Consider testing for PCBs by having your air monitored or test the caulk if it is peeling or visibly deteriorating. Call EPA's PCBs in Caulk Hotline at 888-835-5372 to find a PCB testing lab.
- 2 Call 888-835-5372 or visit <http://www.epa.gov/pcb sincaulk> to find your EPA regional PCB coordinator.
- 3 Talk to your EPA regional PCB coordinator who will provide you with simple actions to take today, and longer term actions for removing the sources of PCBs including developing a cleanup plan.
- 4 Prioritize where you should first concentrate work.
- 5 Implement the plan.
- 6 Retest and monitor for PCBs in the air once removal is complete.

For more information

<http://www.epa.gov/pcb sincaulk/>
EPA's PCBs in Caulk Hotline: 888-835-5372

This fact sheet is intended solely for guidance. It does not replace or supplant the requirements of the Toxic Substances Control Act or the PCB regulations at 40 C.F.R. part 761, and it is not binding on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or individuals. Please refer to the regulations at 40 C.F.R. part 761 for specific requirements relating to PCBs and PCB-containing materials.



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