

NEWS

TOWNSHIP OF WOODBRIDGE



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Woodbridge Township Presents the Findings of the Colonia High School Environmental Assessment Study

Environmental Report Finds No Evidence of Radiological Hazards at Colonia High School and Health Experts Release Reports in Response to Community Concerns

Woodbridge Township – Mayor John E. McCormac, Joseph Massimino, Ed.D, Superintendent Woodbridge Township School District, Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Commissioner Judith Persichilli, New Jersey Department of Health (DOH), today announced the findings of the Environmental Assessment Study undertaken to proactively investigate health-related concerns at Colonia High School that became known through social media post(s), news reports and inquiry from area residents alleging a potential connection between the school and specific health issues.

The encompassing Radiological-Environmental investigation, conducted from April 9 – 30, 2022, was launched to determine whether or not Colonia High School buildings and grounds contained any radiological contaminants that would contribute to diagnoses of brain cancers and other central nervous system tumors or disorders among former alumni, teachers and students. The results of the interior and exterior radiological scoping measurements and interior radon air quality measurements collected during the extensive field investigation uncovered no radiological hazards that warrant further investigation.

Immediately upon learning of the social media reports alleging health-related issues potentially connected to Colonia High School, Mayor McCormac, in concert with the Woodbridge Township School District Administration, the Woodbridge Township Municipal Council and the Woodbridge Township Board of Education, initiated discussions with federal, state, county and local health and environmental agencies. On April 4, Governor Phil Murphy and Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ-06 and Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee) coordinated a strategic meeting to engage the appropriate agencies which included the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), New Jersey Department of Health (DOH), the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), and the Woodbridge Township Department of Health & Human Services.

On April 5, the Woodbridge Township Municipal Council passed an Emergency Authorization to provide \$450,000 in funding for testing and analysis and authorized a \$211,350 contract with T&M Associates, a leading national consulting, engineering, environmental, technical services management company and Cabrera Services, Inc., also a nationally recognized radiological and environmental remediation company, to engage their team of environmentalists to begin collecting data at Colonia High School.

T&M Associates and Cabrera Services initiated a rapid-response radiological scoping investigation of Colonia High School on April 9 in response to alleged radiation exposure-related cancer concerns. Initial background and research determined that the school grounds had no history of development prior to school construction in 1967, which allowed the environmental investigation to focus on radiological hazards near the surface on school grounds and on building surfaces in areas where potential exposure to the student population was possible.

The radiological investigation assessed the building for indications of elevated alpha/beta/gamma radiation levels above background levels on surfaces as well as obtaining representative indoor air radon data. In addition, the field teams performed gamma radiation scanning of unoccupied outdoor school grounds to identify surface/below surface radiological anomalies. The field team placed radon measurement devices and performed measurements during weekend mobilizations to avoid interfering with day-to-day school operations. Overall, radiation survey results from both building surfaces and campus grounds were consistent with normal background levels and no discrete radioactive sources were located. Given the site history prior to school construction and the results of the alpha/beta/gamma radiation measurements collected during the investigation, the environmental investigation concluded that no radiological hazards were identified that warrant further investigation.

“Our most important job at the Department of Environmental Protection is ensuring the health and safety of New Jersey residents, which includes identifying and eliminating potential exposures to natural and manmade contaminants,” said state Commissioner of Environmental Protection Shawn M. LaTourette. “The radiation and environmental health experts at DEP have supported Township officials in the evaluation at Colonia High School. That swift, thorough evaluation has not identified any source of environmental exposures of concern at or in the vicinity of the High School and, based on available information, no further environmental testing or remediation is required.”

Commissioner Judith Persichilli and the Department of Health initiated a discussion with Woodbridge Township in early March to address community concerns about former CHS students, staff and residents who were diagnosed with brain and other central nervous system tumors. To address these cancer concerns, the Department released two reports. One report reviewed data on a radioactive rock found in the school in 1997 and concluded that any harmful health impacts from external exposures to ionization radiation from the rock found in the classroom were not expected. The second report, along with a companion FAQ and Citizen’s Guide, provided the expected numbers of primary malignant and non-malignant brain and other central nervous system tumors among students, staff and teachers at Colonia High School who attended or worked there between 1968 through 2021. The number of expected primary brain and other central nervous system tumors among students over the 1968 to 2021 time period was calculated to range from 98 to 105. The number of these same tumors among teachers and staff over their lifetime was estimated to range from 13 to 14.

“Some people who have cancer concerns may still have questions, many which cannot be answered today because they are specific and personal to each individual. These reports are technical and the Department is committed to addressing individual concerns and discuss the information in the reports in small groups or one-on-one meetings. To schedule an appointment with the Department’s Office of Environmental and Occupational Health Services, please call **609-826-4984**. If you have already reached out to us we will be in touch with you to schedule a time to address your concerns and go over these reports,” said Commissioner Persichilli.

“Please visit the New Jersey State Cancer Registry website for a form to request summary information about your diagnosis. This process, which is available to all New Jersey residents diagnosed with cancer, can help to verify that your cancer information was reported to the State Health Department by your physician,” said Persichilli. “If the State Cancer Registry does not have a record of your cancer diagnosis, you should contact your treating physician. If you have questions, I encourage you to visit the Cancer Registry FAQs on the Health Department’s website at [nj.gov/health https://www.state.nj.us/health/ces/reporting-entities/njsr/](https://www.state.nj.us/health/ces/reporting-entities/njsr/).”

Congressman Frank Pallone said, “I am relieved and thankful that the results of the environmental radiological study in and around Colonia High School have come back negative and do not show a risk to students, staff, and nearby residents. I want to thank Mayor John McCormac for his leadership and judicious response to the community’s concerns. I also want to thank the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Department of Health, US Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry for their guidance and expertise.”

“While residents can breathe a sigh of relief that the New Jersey Department of Health’s scientific research does not show abnormal rates of brain tumors and cancers within the Colonia community, this news does not bring comfort to our neighbors and their families who have suffered from brain tumors. We can all agree that one instance of cancer is too many. My deepest sympathies go out to those who have lost loved ones to this horrible disease, Pallone added.

According to Mayor McCormac, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Health and the Woodbridge Township Department of Health & Human Services will continue to closely monitor the environmental health and safety of the school community, staff, students and families and will continue to provide support and clear communication.

Visit the Woodbridge Township web page at: www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us to view and download the Summary Report: Radiological Investigation for Colonia High School; link to the Department of Health FAQ, Reports and link(s) to the Cancer Registry and all related information.

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