ANNUAL FIRE INSPECTIONS

By Carol Sneyd, Regional Safety Technician

March 31, 1954 is the date of the last mass casualty fire in a New York school. The Cleveland Hill School fire took the lives of fifteen sixth grade students. Those of you who know your history, are aware that the Our Lady of Angels fire in Chicago, Illinois four years later was a larger fire with more casualties.

The Cleveland Hill Fire is less well known. The fire may have originated in a teacher’s work room where stage props were stored. The fire was not detected until it broke through the door of the work room. Once it entered the hallway, it flashed both ways blocking the corridor. Several children tried to leave the room through the open classroom door but fire and smoke flashed into the room. Several children broke the windows and crawled out of the room. The ten students who tried to leave by the door, were later found in the rubble.

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This fire and the Our Lady of Angels fire changed the way that we look at fires in schools. I often hear the question, why do we practice fire drills 12 times per year - there hasn’t been a fire in 50 years? Before schools started proactively planning to protect students from fire, neither staff nor students knew how to respond in a fire. In older construction, doors had transoms for ventilation and windows were large and heavy. Stairwells were open and insufficient to effectively empty upper floors.

Now we have fire drills. We know that doors need to remain closed to keep fire from flashing into classrooms and those doors are fire rated to give our students much needed time to survive. My question is, have we begun to get complacent?

DID YOU KNOW?

Miller Environmental Group offers a wide variety of services to our districts. They have and will respond quickly and professionally to chemical spills and are used by many of you for their LabPack services. BUT did you know that they have a group that does restoration services? They are able to respond in a rapid and professional manner to clean up after a fire or flood. They handle any fire, water or smoke damage to include dehumidification, drying and mold remediation.

Contact Cynthia Braden at 914-248-2456 or cbraden@pnwboces.org to get more information.
Look around your school. Are the exits free from clutter? Is the rescue window accessible or are there items stored in front of it? Do you have so much art work and decorations that the fire rating of the door and walls is compromised? Can you reach the rescue window? Do our electrical closets and boiler rooms have flammable items stored in them?

Regional Safety Services has contracted with Ed Braddick of Facilities Inspection Services LLC to perform fire inspections under CoSER 698.110. Contact us today to schedule your fire inspection.

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**PANEL DISCUSSION ON LEAD**

*By Ellen Lane, Director of School Communications*

With contaminated drinking water in schools in Newark, New Jersey, and Flint, Michigan, making headlines, school leaders are taking a closer look at their own district water supplies. That’s why Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES Regional Safety Services recently offered an informative panel on water testing for school districts.

Panelists included Robert Morris, Director of Environmental Health for Putnam County; Delroy Taylor, an Engineer with the Westchester County Department of Health; Craig Napolitano, Vice President of the Louis Berger Group; and Regional Safety Coordinator Michael Sellet. Also on hand were a number of engineers from Louis Berger.

Speakers discussed the definition of a public water supply, water testing requirements under state and federal law and best practices for school districts in order to safeguard students from tainted water. School district water supplies are considered public regardless of the water source. All of the panelists pointed out that lead contamination, which has been the focus in Newark and Flint school systems, does not arise from the water source but from the pipes that carry the water into the schools. Some school districts have lead-based pipes or lead-based connections. When water sits in the pipes, lead may leach out of the pipe and into the water.

As a result, water from a fountain in one school may be free of contaminants while another fountain shows lead levels of concern. That means the only way to be certain of the water’s purity is to test throughout the school district, some might even say to test every fountain or tap. The federal Environmental Protection Agency has set 15 parts per billion as the action threshold for lead in drinking water.
School districts also may opt to flush their water systems to eliminate water that has been sitting in the pipes. This can be done following school vacations or long weekends. Some districts even make a practice of flushing the pipes before school begins each Monday.

Sellet urged participants to consider how they will inform the public of any water testing and results. What’s more, he said districts should have a remediation plan ready to go in the event that excessive levels of lead are found anywhere in the district.

Louis Berger Services are available under CoSER 698.110 Consultant Services. Contact Cindy Braden, cbraden@pnwboces.org for more information.

REGIONAL SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
By Carol Sneyd, Regional Safety Technician

On March 17, 2016 the Regional Safety Committee met at the Fox Meadow Campus. We heard a very informative presentation by James Cuilla, who works as a consultant for Regional Safety Services. Jim was charged by our department to research mass emergency notification and management software programs and suppliers. He described the services of two - Regroup and Rapid Response. Both companies are good at what they do, but Rapid Response is endorsed by the NYS Sheriffs Association. The committee asked Mike Sellet and Jim Cuilla to continue working with Rapid Response to find out more about their product.

SCHOOL CHEMICAL MANAGEMENT
By Carol Sneyd, Regional Safety Technician

In last month’s issue, we shared information from the NYS DEC regarding iodine in schools. When we think of chemicals in schools, the focus naturally turns to science labs and store rooms. While this is a source of some of the most challenging situations for chemical clean up, it is important to remember that art rooms, technology programs and custodial and maintenance store rooms can all be sites of chemicals.

According to the NYS DEC, the problematic chemicals can be found in the following products: certain glues, dyes, paints, paint thinners, strippers, certain paint pigments, ceramic glazes, photography developing fluids and stop baths, heavy metal fumes from soldering, stains, varnishes, and even the dust involved in wood working.

It is important that we not only inventory our science chemical closets on an annual basis, but that we also check that the materials used in our art and technology programs are the “greenest” ones available. Proper ventilation should be provided in these areas.

Custodial and maintenance store rooms need to be inventoried and organized on a yearly basis. All custodial cleaners should meet the NYS Green Clean protocols for purchasing of cleaners. Insecticides and herbicides must be used in accordance with the NYS School Pesticide Regulations. All gas operated machinery should be stored in butler or other shed buildings. Gasoline, oil and antifreeze should be stored in accordance with safety regulations at all times.