

The Opportunity Academy at Riggins

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Mr. Fred H. Stewart, III, Principal

Mr. Leroy Smith, Assistant Principal

April 6, 2011

Dear parents:

You may have noticed work crews preparing to remove and replace soil at The Opportunity Academy at Riggins (TOAR) at the front and rear of the school. I wanted to inform you of why the work is being done.

Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) required Walter Coke, Inc. (formerly Sloss Industries) to perform soil sampling investigations at multiple community locations near its facility, including around the TOAR building. Tests showed that polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) were present at unacceptable levels. These contaminants can come from a variety of sources, both industrial and non-industrial. Some of the non-industrial sources are roofing tar, exhaust from cars, burning leaves and trash and even from outdoor grilling and cigarette smoke.

In response to these findings in 2010, the Birmingham City Schools notified parents and faculty (using an EPA-composed fact sheet in English and Spanish), posted precautionary yard signage on the playground and at the roof drip line areas, and erected a mesh fence around the drip line of the school to prevent access and potential exposure.

Walter Coke has agreed to construct temporary fencing to prevent access, remove the affected soils, replace the soil with clean fill and then apply sod at TOAR. At the completion of these actions within the next month, the potential risk should be reduced to safe levels.

We want to assure you that the health, safety and welfare of our students are of primary concern to the Board of Education and district and school administration. We will continue to consult with EPA and will take any steps that may be needed to protect human health and the environment.

Sincerely,

Fred H. Stewart, III

For More Information

Health Questions on PAHs: Visit www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts69.pdf. You may contact the federal health agency that works with EPA, called the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), for questions about the properties of PAHs; Dana Robison at 770-488-3744, or the CDC hotline at 1-888-422-8737. Keep in mind that they can discuss the potential health effects of exposure to PAH's, but note they cannot discuss an individual's medical conditions, provide medical care, or a diagnosis.

Medical Questions: Contact your physician, State Health Department, local health clinic, or the Southeast Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) at (404) 727-9428 or www.sph.emory.edu/PEHSU/. Robert J. Geller, MD, Pediatric Toxicologist and Professor of Pediatrics, Emory University School of Medicine, stated, "The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depends upon the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits. In this situation, given the vegetation and limited contact with soils, data suggests that the dose posed little risk in the short term, but cleaning up soils prevents longer term exposures."

Soil Sampling or Removal: Contact Brian Holtzclaw, EPA Community Engagement Coordinator at 404-562-8684; holtzclaw.brian@epa.gov.

School Issues: Call principal's office, 205-231-3675; or Bob Morgan, Director of Capital Projects, 205-231-2082.