



New Jersey  
**Work Environment Council**  
Safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment

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Patrick Breysse, PhD, CIH Director  
NCEH/ATSDR Office of the Director  
DCHI Headquarter  
ATSDR Division of Community Health Investigations  
4770 Buford Hwy, NE (MS F59)  
Atlanta, GA 30341-3717

Dear Dr. Breysse,

We are writing to express concern that many states, school districts, students and their families, employees in school districts and the public are unaware that [rubber-like polyurethane floors](#) were installed in gym floors in schools as well as in other buildings such as hospitals and nursing homes since the 1960's. Phenyl mercuric acetate (PMA) which was used as a catalyst in the floors, breaks down and releases odorless, colorless mercury vapor at room temperature. The floors, and the items that have been in contact with them, emit harmful mercury vapor indefinitely which can damage the central nervous system, kidneys, lungs, skin and eyes and is especially harmful to young children and fetuses whose bodies are still developing.

This critical information is missing from some ATSDR fact sheets and literature on mercury exposure. Your alert to the general public, "ATSDR AND EPA Warn the Public About Continuing Patterns of Metallic Mercury Exposure" in 1997 at <https://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/mercury.htm> does not include these floors or equipment. We realize it is possible ATSDR was not aware of mercury in gym flooring in schools in 1997. However, ATSDR has known of the potential exposure to mercury from gym floors at least since 2006, yet literature dated 2012 currently on the website, does not include it, see Appendix 1.

The flooring issue is pervasive. At the time of performing our investigation in 2017 at least six states had dealt with the issue, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Oregon, Michigan, Ohio and the state of Arizona had identified 176 potential mercury floors in 220 school districts. New Jersey has recently received significant media coverage due to the health risks and issues regarding the presence and remediation of mercury contaminated gym floors in many school districts. New Jersey is just beginning to understand the depth of this problem in their schools however, many other states are still unaware of the presence of these floors or the potential exposure these floors can cause.

We are requesting you issue another alert to the general public and school districts in the US about the potential exposure to mercury from these floors in schools and wherever else they were installed and the equipment that becomes contaminated from them.

In addition to creating a public alert and updating ATSDR's literature, we recommend that the literature be changed from "floors were installed from the 1960's to the 1980's" as we recently dealt with a floor that was installed in 2006 at a school in Washington Township, NJ. To prevent a reoccurrence of this health hazard, it is also critical that you disseminate information to prevent the installation of new mercury catalyst floors. When addressing new flooring we ask that the following language regarding recommendations be considered:

***Prevent installation of new mercury catalyst floors:*** Boards of Education and school district administrations should work with the Department of Education (DOE) and architects and contractors to prevent the installation of new mercury-containing floors. If a new rubber-like polyurethane floor is being considered for installation, a written statement should be requested from the manufacturer certifying that it does not contain PMA or other mercury catalysts. The statement should include the information the manufacturer is relying upon. Ideally, this will include analytical results of samples of the flooring materials.

It is imperative that we protect school children, staff and the public by eliminating exposure to this potentially dangerous flooring hazard. Informing them of the danger is the first step to accomplishing this. We recommend you contact your colleagues at EPA and inform them of the hazard as they have a responsibility in informing the public about this health issue.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention. We look forward to hearing from you regarding our request.

Sincerely,



Debra Coyle McFadden  
Executive Director  
NJ Work Environment Council

cc: Cory Booker, United States Senator  
Bob Menendez, United States Senator  
Leah Graziano, RS, Regional Director, ATSDR NY  
Marie Blistan, President, New Jersey Education Association  
Jessica Martinez, Co-Director, National Council for Occupational Safety & Health  
Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, Co-Director, National Council for Occupational Safety & Health

