

April 2014

Roofing Repairs at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Schools

Why are school roofs being repaired?

Over time, the integrity of a roof changes and upgrades are needed in order to ensure a safe learning environment for the students. Over the next three years, the TDSB will be working on roofing projects in order to maintain school buildings in Toronto.

How will the roofs be repaired?

Roof repairs involve using layers of felts and hot-applied asphalt. The asphalt is usually delivered to the school as a solid and it is inserted into a roofing kettle and heated. The liquid asphalt is applied to the roof surfaces using specialized mops. As the asphalt is heated, it is likely to generate odours. At times, the odours might be strong, but are unlikely to affect health.

Are products used for roofing repairs hazardous?

Asphalt used for roofing projects is a complex mixture containing thousands of chemical compounds. The chemicals in asphalt vary depending on the source of crude oil and the type of asphalt being used. The odours generated during the heating of asphalt may contain a variety of compounds, but they tend to quickly disperse in the ambient air. They are unlikely to adversely impact on health.

I smell odours, does this mean I am being exposed to harmful fumes?

No. Some of the compounds found in asphalt have very low odour thresholds. This means that they can be detected in the air at concentrations not associated with adverse health effects. Smelling odours as a result of roofing repairs is not indicative of negative health impacts.

What measures are being taken to reduce exposures during the roofing project?

The TDSB is taking a number of measures in order to reduce exposures including:

- keeping classroom windows closed
- setting window air conditioners to re-circulate air
- when possible conduct the work outside of school hours

In addition, the TDSB requested the roofing contractor to take the following measures:

- locating the roof tar heating kettle away from doors, windows, and fresh air intake
- ensuring all air intake openings are closed and sealed
- ensuring the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system is put in to recirculation mode
- if necessary, provide temporary fans
- request that all windows and doors remain closed
- review the Material Safety Data Sheets to ensure all listed precautions are in place

Who can I call if I have additional questions?

Speak to the school's principal about the roofing work or about any concerns that you may have.

If you have a medical condition and are concerned about inhaling roofing asphalt emissions, you should discuss your concerns with your physician.