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April 23, 2012

Ms. Lorraine Grillo
President and Chief Executive Officer
New York City School Construction Authority
3030 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear President Grillo:

I am writing to strongly urge the School Construction Authority to suspend asbestos abatement work (and other work affecting air quality) at P.S. 29 in Brooklyn until the 2011-2012 school year is over. Asbestos is a known carcinogen, and the lack of clarity, transparency, and discussion about asbestos abatement at P.S. 29 is of great concern.

At a bare minimum, I believe that the SCA is obligated to hold off on any asbestos work for at least seven calendar days – since public posting of the work was not provided in advance, as required under the NYC Department of Environmental Protection’s Asbestos Rules and Regulations (Title 15, Chapter 1 of the Rules of the City of New York), which your staff have indicated will be followed for the P.S. 29 project.

Parents of the schoolchildren at P.S. 29 are understandably concerned about the construction project, and this concern has been amplified by the lack of notification and the inadequate information provided by the SCA, particularly as it relates to the removal of asbestos. The SCA failed to provide detailed, written information to the full P.S. 29 community that describes how SCA intends to meet the protocols necessary to keep students safe during asbestos abatement until today, when the work is scheduled to begin. We still do not have adequate information on the classrooms affected or the duration of the work. This lack of notification and information does not foster confidence that the proper asbestos safety procedures will be followed.

I understand that the renovation work planned for P.S. 29 – including exterior masonry, roof replacement, and parapet replacement – will take place after school hours into the late evenings, on weekends, and school holidays. However, the demolition and rebuilding of the exterior masonry requires the removal of asbestos from around the school’s windows, which will have an impact on interior school spaces while school is still in session.

I was particularly troubled to learn that the P.S. 29 community – administrators, teachers, students, and parents – are expected to wait, each day that asbestos abatement occurs, for a “re-occupancy” letter, indicating that air-quality monitoring has confirmed that the classrooms affected are safe. Parents and teachers should not have to be on “standby” regarding their children’s health. In addition, the SCA’s lack of transparency about the asbestos abatement elements on this project have made it more difficult for parents to believe that they are being given all of the relevant information.

SCA should put the students’ and teachers’ health first and suspend asbestos abatement work until the 2011-2012 school year is over.

I appreciate your consideration of my recommendation and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Lander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brad" being more prominent than the last name "Lander".

Brad Lander
City Councilmember, District 39