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**Get in. Be moved.**

## EDUCATION: York boards staying on top of problem, officials say

# Portable mould blamed on their faulty design

BY JENNIFER BROWN  
STAFF WRITER

York Region school officials insist mould and fungus lurking in portable classrooms in other districts isn't a serious problem here.

While board officials admit any building that has a leaky roof or aging carpet can be a breeding ground for the mould, known as stachybotrys atra, they have found no evidence of it spreading, as it has in Peel and Halton school board portables.

"A couple incidents we have actually found in minor areas were a result of a leakage problem, roof-related," said public board superintendent of plant services Dave Snelgrove, indicating repairs have been made to portables with leaky roofs.

Last summer, both boards used an outside consulting firm to inspect the 800 portables in the region and the separate board also used the services of a University of Toronto micrologist who specializes in fungus.

"They went through the 373 portables in our system and identified concerns on a scale of one to five and looked not for the mould, but conditions conducive to the growth of mould," said separate board public relations officer Chris Cable.

Inspection of public board portables revealed one had traces of the mould, but it was not active. The walls of the portable were ripped out and extensive work was done to repair the building.

"I think we've been fairly open about this. We have a plan to get at them and do the renovations and remove the carpet when we're doing the renovation," said Snelgrove.

The problem with portables is their faulty design. The buildings often shift in winter as a result of cold temperatures, causing the flat roof of a portable to become displaced and allowing leaks to occur.

The detailed inspections have also prompted the school boards to request all new portables be built with sloped roofs to prevent moisture from settling in the ceiling and walls.

In fact, the public board has increased its budget for portable maintenance by \$700,000, for a total budget of \$1 million.

Snelgrove says the board has always had a repair and maintenance program that has prevented development of mould.

Students in Mississauga have complained of headaches, fatigue, muscle pain, coughs and shortness of breath as a result of exposure to the mould.

Parents in that community are outraged the mould has been found in all the public school portables in Peel Region.

In a CTV W5 report aired Tuesday night, it was revealed that the Peel medical officer of health refused to acknowledge mould was detrimental to the health of students.

"The separate board and ourselves have also sat down with the health unit and we talked quite openly about the problem Peel was having."

Cable says the two York Region boards have been proactive, looking at the problem before it even erupted in Peel and Halton.

"It has been very different here, compared to other regions where there were ill feelings between the health department and the school boards."

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