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Electrical pollution takes its toll on school

by Ken Luchterhand of the Chronicle

Angela Olstad almost quit being a fourth grade teacher and principal.

Although she loved her job at the Mindoro school, she couldn't handle being sick so often.

The whole right side of her body went numb. She had terrible headaches, vision problems and felt completely exhausted at the end of a work day.

She had never been able to teach for an entire week without calling in sick. This had gone on more than two years.

She was about to quit when a cause had been found for her illness - electrical pollution.

Electrical filters soon were placed throughout the school and now she says she feels better than ever.

She's not the only person making these claims. Several other teachers have been convinced of the electrical pollution theory and swear to its authenticity.

"I feel better," said teacher Sharon Kaczrowski. "All my sinus problems are gone. I was always fighting a sinus infection before."

Teacher Aide Dawn Rand agrees, and said she used to experience chest pains and sinus problems. Before, when she walked up the stairs, she could hardly breathe. Since the filters have been installed, she hasn't had any chest pains and her sinuses have cleared.

"I'm definitely a believer," Rand said. "I have them installed in my home now."

Olstad has worked for the Melrose-Mindoro School District for 15 years. She worked at the Melrose building as a kindergarten teacher for 10 years, then switched to the Mindoro building five years ago, when she began teaching fourth grade.

That's when the health problems began surfacing.

At the end of October during her first year, her whole right side went numb, a problem that continued for four months. Her ability to think became difficult and she always felt exhausted. She began to see double at the end of the second year.



Angela Onstad, teacher and principal at Melrose-Mindoro Elementary, Mindoro, shows an electrical filter in her left hand and an Rf meter in her right hand. Ideally, the Rf meter should show below 50 for a healthy environment. Chronicle photo by Ken Luchterhand

Meanwhile, Administrator Ron Perry was trying to find out what was causing her illness. State inspectors came to the school and, after some analysis, they determined it was being caused by mold.

During the summer, the school was completely cleaned, including the heating ducts, tunnels and ceiling tiles. It cost the district about \$100,000, she said.

Olstad's health improved during the summer because she spent time away from her classroom.

However, when she returned to her third year at Mindoro, the symptoms returned. The numbness on one side of her body returned.

"I need to be out of this room," she told herself. "There must be something that was skipped."

She told Perry about the return of her health problems and her classroom was completely stripped and cleaned. Everything was bleached.

"My students were in a traveling classroom for a month while they tore my classroom apart," Olstad said.

She had been to a general practitioner physician, an allergist and an eye doctor. A neurologist at Mayo Clinic diagnosed her as having benign multiple sclerosis.

"I had never been so sick in my life," she said. "It even hurt to put my head on the pillow at night."

The sickness was so great, she was ready to quit teaching.

Then, early one morning Perry and Melrose-Mindoro District Board of Education President Bob Hardie came to the school to hold a meeting. They told the group of teachers they think they know what the problem might be.

The only thing that had changed over the years, they explained, was the amount of electricity used by the school. More computers and other electrical devices increased the demand for electricity.

The culprit: electrical pollution emanating from the electrical wiring, they concluded.

"I didn't want to believe it," Olstad said. "I was the biggest skeptic there."

Dave Stetzer of Stetzer Electric, Blair, was contracted to isolate the problem and make any adjustments to alleviate the problem. Stetzer found the amount of radio frequency electromagnetic fields were too high, so he installed electrical filters in every outlet.

Besides the Mindoro school, the Melrose-Mindoro High School and the Melrose school also were fitted with filters.

Weeks after the filter installation, Olstad and other teachers began to report they felt much better. Even students were in better health, she said.

Before the problem was diagnosed, 37 children were on inhalers. Now, only five children are using inhalers.

"I haven't had a headache since. I have never felt this good," Olstad said. "Some people come here feeling bad and when they leave at the end of the day, they are feeling good."

The temperature in the computer lab dropped 20 degrees since the filters have been installed, yet the thermostat hasn't been changed.

Many of the teachers have installed electrical filters in their homes. Each filter costs \$25 and it usually takes 20 for an average house, Olstad said.

Stetzer recently spoke before the Wisconsin School Board convention about the hazards of electrical pollution. Blair-Taylor, CFC, Brighton and Marshfield schools now have filters installed at each school building.

Rep. Barbara Gronemus (D) - Whitehall has introduced legislation (bill AB529) that would require something done about electrical pollution.

"It's time they do something," Olstad said. "What is it doing to our children?"

No one from Xcel Energy, the supplier of electricity to the school, would speak on the subject.

Also, no doctor could be located who would speak on the validity of electrical pollution's affects on health.

"It has changed so many lives," Olstad said. "I'm so thankful that the filters have been installed. The cost is so minimal considering the benefits."

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