

Public health issues raised in House

Liberals ask about asbestos, air quality and pesticides

dbartlett@thetelegram.com

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones raised a number of concerns under the umbrella of public health in the House of Assembly Tuesday.

Her first question was about reports her party gained through access to information on the way asbestos was removed from St. Patrick's Mercy Home in St. John's.

The Liberals have raised questions about this during a previous sitting.

The reports state a proper asbestos management plan was not being followed as recently as 2007.

Both Health Minister Jerome Kennedy and Government Services Minister Kevin O'Brien said they would find out more about the reports.

Jones asked similar questions about the province's registry of deeds, located in the bowels of Confederation Building.



In September of this year, The Telegram reported that 14 of the approximately 40 title researchers at the registry have been diagnosed with various cancers in the last four years. While there is no proof as to what may Tracy Hayley, a researcher for a private firm, speaks to reporters about air quality conditions at the registry of deeds in the basement of Confederation Building. be causing the cancer, there are a number of potential factors related to the registry.

There was asbestos removed from the area in recent years, the registry is located near a power generator and there is still a halon fire-suppression system.

That chemical has been banned for years throughout the country, and this province started phasing halon systems out more than a decade ago.

O'Brien said the registry will be moving to a new location on Elizabeth Avenue in the near future.

But reporters descended to the basement of Confederation Building to speak with Tracy Hayley, one of the title researchers who has been employed by a private firm for the last five years.

She said some of the documents she works with are more than 200 years old, and there is a lot of dust and possibly mould on many of the documents. That is considered another possible cause of some of the workers' illnesses.

Though Hayley is looking forward to the move to Elizabeth Avenue for health reasons, she said it may not completely solve the problem.

"That's not to say we won't be bringing the contaminants with us (in the documents)," she said.

And Hayley isn't sure if dust removal may damage the historical records, which adds another layer of concern.

When asked if Hayley and her co-workers feel like they're the forgotten dungeon dwellers of Confederation Building, she said "absolutely."

"We've been raising some concerns down here for a number of years. They've been (falling) on deaf ears," she said.

Jones also raised a number of questions in the House on whether the province will consider banning the cosmetic use of pesticides in the province.

She said a coalition of groups — such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the

Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association — are advocating for such a ban, which has also been endorsed by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL) through a resolution at a recent meeting.

Environment Minister Charlene Johnson said she's met with the coalition and industry on the matter and is aware of the MNL resolution.

But the minister said the province is also aware of a lawsuit against another province after it banned a particular pesticide.

She said the province will study the full issue before it decides if it will implement any kind of ban.