

Board Office Use: Legislative File Info.	
File ID Number	21-2930
Introduction Date	11/18/2021
Enactment Number	
Enactment Date	



**OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
Community Schools, Thriving Students

# Board Cover Memorandum

**To** Board of Education

**From** Kyla Johnson-Trammell, Superintendent  
Joshua R. Daniels, Chief Governance Officer  
Tadashi Nakadegawa, Deputy Chief of Facilities Planning and Management  
Rebecca Littlejohn, Risk Manager

**Meeting Date** November 18, 2021

**Subject** Subsurface Contamination in OUSD

**Action** Receive presentation regarding subsurface contamination in OUSD

**Background** For two school sites within OUSD, it is now known that subsurface groundwater underneath or nearby the sites is contaminated with volatile organic compounds (“VOCs”) that originated offsite: McClymonds High School and the Acorn Woodland/EnCompass campus. The concern is that vapor from these VOCs migrated up and into the indoor air. (The concern regarding VOCs and indoor air is different that the concerns regarding drinking water or air pollution.) The indoor air was tested at both sites and was found to be safe.

It is important to note that in most instances the risk of VOCs is from long-term exposure (i.e., over decades) rather than short-term exposure. VOCs are present in everyday household items (e.g., printers, cleaning products). Therefore, the important questions do not involve asking about exposure but rather: (i) In what concentrations are VOCs present in indoor air in OUSD schools? (ii) At what concentrations are VOCs dangerous to students and staff?

**Discussion** The issue of subsurface contamination was not known prior to these incidents. As a result, OUSD staff has spent a significant amount of time understanding and researching the issue. In particular, staff has worked closely with the Alameda County Department of Environmental Health to learn about the science of and data regarding subsurface contamination. The presentation is an effort to present the Facilities Committee and the public with staff’s current level of information and knowledge regarding subsurface contamination.

The presentation includes maps of known VOC releases (both districtwide maps as well as maps of each school site). These maps show which areas of the District have the most known releases. It should not be surprising that these are the same areas that have been disproportionately impacted in other ways (e.g., COVID rates, poverty, educational outcomes). In other words, these maps

illustrate the historic and present racism and injustice of environmental contamination.

The maps are being shared in order to be transparent with the Committee and the public regarding what is known at this time and what is not. (The data underlying the maps are already public, although these particular maps were developed for OUSD.) However, there is a risk in sharing these maps that they will cause unnecessary alarm. Not every release near a school site is a problem. The potential risk to a particular site depends on a variety of factors such as the location of known VOC releases, what VOCs were released, and the likelihood of vapor intrusion. Additionally, even when these factors do indicate the need to test, this does not necessarily mean that there is a problem. At both McClymonds and Acorn Woodland/EnCompass, the indoor air needed to be tested and yet was found to be safe.

Lastly, it is important to note that the risk from indoor air instruction at schools is not the only risk from subsurface contamination. VOCs migrate up from the groundwater throughout an area—into homes and other buildings as well as schools. OUSD is addressing the potential risk of indoor air instruction to its schools but it is the responsibility of the city and the county to do the same for the communities in the surrounding areas.

**Fiscal Impact**

No fiscal impact. However, the presentation notes that an RFP is forthcoming. The eventual contract(s) from the RFP will have associated costs.

**Attachment(s)**

- Presentation
- Individual School Site Maps of Nearby Known VOC Releases