

## **Guidelines for PTAs for Keeping our Children Safe in Portable Classrooms**

### **When a Portable is being moved to your school:**

- Find out where the portable is coming from. Is it new or used? If it is used, what condition is the portable? Is there any history of indoor air quality complaints? How old is the portable? What can you find out about the work orders completed on that portable? Your Principal should be able to find out these answers for you. If your principal is unable to get the answers, contact Sean Yarup (Supervisor, IAQ) at [Sean\\_R\\_Yarup@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Sean_R_Yarup@mcpsmd.org) for information about the condition of the portable. Contact James Song (Director, Construction) at [James\\_Song@mcpsmd.org](mailto:James_Song@mcpsmd.org) for information on the installation and work needed at installation. Copy Joe Lavorgna (Director, Dept. of Facilities) in your emails at [Joseph\\_Lavorgna@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Joseph_Lavorgna@mcpsmd.org). If still no answer, contact the MCCPTA Safety Chair for help.
- Ask to be involved in discussions on placement of the portable. Will it be installed on a blacktop? If it is being placed on grass, is MCPS bringing in an architectural engineer to check proper drainage and the possibility of landscape grading? Is the location safe (i.e. away from idling vehicles, away from sewer vents, close enough to the building so students don't have to walk too far)?
- If the portable is used, ask for permission to inspect it, ideally before delivery. If the portable looks in bad shape, find out if MCPS will be doing necessary repairs. What to look for when inspecting: areas showing water infiltration, stains on ceiling, buckling floor tiles, cracked tiles, dark stains around outside of windows, ants or evidence of vermin, musty smell or bad odors. Do tiles pop up easily? If so, look under them for evidence of mold on the floor, especially near the window. If windows are operable, make sure they open and close properly. If you have a moisture meter, check the walls. If you are concerned about mold/ water infiltration, tell your Principal and have him/her call Sean Yarup of the MCPS Indoor Air Quality team.
- If a portable is used, ask when the HVAC was last serviced and when the filters were last changed. After the portables are installed, the filter should be changed and the HVAC should have been serviced within the last year.
- If the portable still has carpet, ask MCPS to remove it.
- If you notice anything unusual (for example, nails that are sticking out that are dangerous, water pooling underneath the portable, etc.) during the installation process, voice your concern with the Principal.
- Are portables sitting for weeks on the property and not being set up? Portables should be installed promptly after they are delivered to the school to prevent damage and water infiltration.
- Once installed, are the portables being ventilated during the summer? Check to make sure portables are hooked up and ventilation running ASAP after installation.
- Find out the security measures that are being taken for additional portables.

### **What to Monitor with Current Portables:**

- PTAs should keep a close eye on the portables. Ask your Principal if the Building Service Managers can share maintenance records to ensure they are being maintained properly.
- If you notice any signs of water infiltration, contact the Principal. Leaks should be promptly fixed to prevent mold growth. Any musty or bad odors should be investigated by the Indoor Air Quality Team.
- Monitor the health of students and teachers who spend time in the portables. A large proportion of students with respiratory problems occurring throughout the year is a reason to report an air quality complaint and have it investigated by the Indoor Air Quality Team.
- Make sure building service staff are dusting and cleaning the portables frequently using MCPS approved chemicals.
- Continue to monitor security issues-elementary schools should all have a swipe card for entry to the school building and the portable. How is the school monitoring students while they are moving back and forth from school to portable?

### **Staff Portable Safety Practices:**

Here are some guidelines that staff should be following:

- Keep your door locked when class is in session and when alone in your classroom.
- Do not open windows or prop doors open. When windows are open, it does not allow the ventilation units to run efficiently and changes the pressurization of the room which can cause moisture and mold growth. Keeping doors open does the same thing, and is a safety issue. Propping the doors open also can damage the door, causing openings for water to infiltrate.
- Allow the ventilation to run continuously- do not turn off the thermostat. Doing so allows for CO2 levels to increase in the room and does not keep the room in correct balance for efficiency and healthy air.
- It is best not to keep a rug in the portable (Rugs attract allergens and mold.)
- Report leaks immediately to the administrator. Leaks must be fixed ASAP to prevent mold growth. If a leak is not attended to and fixed properly or in a timely manner, don't ignore the issue because this is a potentially serious health concern. Report buckling floor tiles or cracks in floor tiles to the Division of Maintenance.
- Report ceiling stains to your administrator.
- If the room smells musty or has a strange odor, report it to the MCPS Indoor Air Quality Team.
- If a staff member or students are having respiratory or other ill symptoms, report your concerns to your administrator. File an indoor air quality complaint (can be found on MCPS website) if you suspect unhealthy conditions in your building or portable.
- Do not put books or other items on or close to any ventilation units.
- Do not use chemicals that are not approved by MCPS.
- It is best not to have plants or animals in a portable.

More detailed information can be found on the MCPS website at:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/iaq/index.shtml>