

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 20, 2017
Superintendent Lori Haukeness
lhaukeness@cortez.k12.co.us
970-565-7282

High school demolition on hold for state health department ruling

The retired Montezuma-Cortez High School demolition site sits silent while the school district waits for a ruling from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

At issue is whether coating on the concrete blocks used in construction of the building contains friable asbestos — asbestos fibers that could be released into the air during demolition.

The district's goal is to ensure high standards of community safety and air quality while using the most cost-effective method and reserving funds for proposed improvements on Panther Stadium.

"We've really done our due diligence in trying to save taxpayer dollars while maintaining a focus on public safety," said RE-1 Superintendent Lori Haukeness. "As soon as we hear the ruling, we have a Plan A and a Plan B in place, and we're ready to implement one as soon as we receive final approval."

"Everybody is ready to move immediately," Haukeness said. "We're eager to get the school demolished and repurpose the land for the community."

Contaminated materials will be transported to an approved asbestos facility in Utah, and clean material will go to the Montezuma County Landfill. All recyclable material will be removed.

Montezuma-Cortez School District Re-1's scientific and asbestos consultant, Michael Schluterbusch, of Abbey Environmental Management, Inc., a Westminster, Colo., firm, believes that laboratory testing has shown that the asbestos fibers are captured in a resinous material and are not friable. If CDPHE rules that is the case, the building can be taken down using a method called "controlled demolition," which uses water to control small particles released during the process of removing the block walls without disturbing the coating.

Controlled demolition would be less costly than the alternative method, which uses hydro-blasting to remove the coating from the blocks.

"The school board wants to be responsible to the community and the voters," said Eric Whyte, vice president of the RE-1 board. "The professionals we have on board have put a very precise plan. It's out of our hands and we're waiting on the state."

Officials could not speculate on a timeline for the remainder of the project until the district receives CDPHE's requirements.

"The district places public safety as our top priority during the abatement of all hazardous material from the building, while we complete the demolition in a timely, cost-effective manner," said Kemper Elementary Principal Jamie Haukeness, who is in charge of facilities for the district. "Our plans are in place and we're ready to go."

The first phase of the project, demolition of newer portions of the structure, was completed earlier this summer.

RE-1 submitted its proposal to CDPHE in July, and district administrators met with health department officials last month. The district cannot proceed with demolition until CDPHE rules.

Questions about the retired high school project can be directed to the district office at 970-565-7282.