Expert asked to evaluate cleanup safety

By LOIS PECTEAU

Health officials planned to meet today with an industrial hygienist from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health to discuss the safety precautions at the cleanup at the State Office Building in downtown Binghamton.

"We want to make sure that our surveillance and training are adequate and that we're not overlooking something . . . Obviously we have some (workers) not used to this; it's not customary for them to be around chemicals," said Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, Broome County health commissioner.

The state building has been closed since last Thursday, when a fire and explosion in a basement transformer blasted about 180 gallons of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) coolant throughout the room and contaminated other areas of the building with fumes and ash.

Officials now say the building probably will be closed at least through next week while the cleanup continues.

"The state health department not only has to certify the building for being free of the contamination, but the building will have to be certified for a good electrical system and fire protection system," said David K. Seiffert, of the State Office of General Services, who is supervising the cleanup and repair of the building.

[illegible] "more" when the building would reopen, but said he still expects the first round of cleaning to be complete by Tuesday.

Yesterday an industrial hygienist hired by the state began instructing workers and supervisors about proper procedure when handling the material contaminated PCBs.

"I've been helping to instruct all the crews in some of the finer points," said Robert Peterson of Gaston Technical Services Inc. of Syracuse.

Peterson said the procedure at the state building was similar to cleaning up a chemical spill or a railroad car.

"You need to wear protective halls, respirators and gloves. The most important thing is [illegible]

[illegible] state officials [illegible] of the workers [illegible] that have been in contact as they should have been the first few days of the cleanup.

"Some of it is just bad habits — you want to rub your forehead (while in the building) or something like that," Seiffert said.

Health officials said about 200 people have been in the state building since the transformer exploded, including cleanup workers, firemen, officials and the heads of state agencies who toured their areas of the building Tuesday.

As a precautionary measure, health officials said they have taken blood samples for future testing from everyone who has been in the building.

Schecter said the only health problems he would expect to see from this type of exposure would be very minor temporary skin irritations or headaches. He said about three people had complained of this type of problem.

"Long-term (health) problems which center in the liver would stem from massive doses for long periods of time. We will not have that here," Schecter said.

As an extra precaution, however, Schecter said he has asked the state health department to send three nurses and a doctor to the scene.

"We are trying to monitor all the people who have been exposed," Schecter said.



[illegible] state public health inspector, operates air pump and [illegible] quality of air in first-floor company room in County Office [illegible]