

January 15, 2008

Anne M. Noonan, Director
Vermont State Employees' Association
155 State Street
PO Box 518
Montpelier, VT 05601

Dear Ms. Noonan:

I am writing to make sure that you have correct information regarding the role of state and federal agencies—as well as the scientific facts—in determining the outcome of the Bennington State Office Building.

As health commissioner, my goal is to provide state employees and the public with a clear view of the process and data that led to the Vermont Department of Health's recommendation to remediate the building and restore it to an environmentally safe and healthy workplace.

The Health Department, by law, is the guiding authority on this issue. Our role is to determine if the building is safe before any state employee will be permitted to go back into the building.

To do so, I have weighed all the data and scientific information together, including the environmental data, the medical data, and employee health information.

I called in the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH). NIOSH is the national institute charged with providing training, consultation and information in the area of occupational safety and health. While NIOSH provided expert help, I also insisted that the State contract with independent environmental engineers – Turner Building Science & Design, LLC – to get further critical data.

In a January 2, 2008 letter from NIOSH to VSEA, NIOSH stated that the Health Department's recommendation to remediate the building "is consistent with approaches recommended by NIOSH and other authorities for addressing indoor air quality issues related to dampness and microbial contamination."

VSEA may not understand the type of information that the Health Department still expects from NIOSH. There is no further report coming, only a little more detail (further subtyping) of the microbes that have already been identified. The Health Department's team of experts already has the depth of data we need, and upon which we have based our recommendations.

The Health Department has, from the start, been committed to complete transparency. We will continue to provide employees with frank and candid information. Reports, documents and communication with employees are all posted online and accessible to all on the Health Department's website at healthvermont.gov, then select Community Public Health.

I don't expect to change VSEA's mind about the best solution for the Bennington state office building. I know, however, that VSEA shares my passionate concern for the health and wellbeing of state employees. I hope we can work together to make sure all voices are heard.

Sincerely,

Sharon Moffatt, RN, MSN
Commissioner of Health