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Jan. 12, 1983

Local

The Evening Press • Binghamton, N.Y.

State challenges TV tower report

By STEVE GEIMANN

State officials today challenged CBS News's report that the State has spent \$15 million so far to clean the Binghamton State Office Building.

CBS News today said the cleanup has cost the state \$15 million and could exceed \$30 million before the 18-story tower reopens sometime next year.

John F. Hudacs, executive deputy commissioner, Office of General Services, said the state has spent \$7.6 million for cleaning since the building was closed two years ago.

"I have no idea where they got the figures," Hudacs said today. "It's not accurate."

Hudacs said he planned to call CBS News in New York to correct the cost estimates and to clarify other points made in the broadcast. Hudacs called the 4-minute report "inaccurate, selective and exaggerated."

Douglas Manning, the CBS News producer who prepared the report, said yesterday the cost estimates came from the Office of General Services.

Meanwhile, the state health department today said air tests to find tetrachlorodibenzodioxin,

the most poisonous chemical in the building, were inadequate and will be repeated.

Peter Stocum, spokesman for the state Health Department, said test equipment could not measure dioxin compounds at the suggested level of two-tenths of a trillionth of a gram per cubic meter in air.

The television report, seen at 8:30 a.m. on the CBS Morning News, described the contamination as "a 20th Century nightmare" more "frightening" than the dioxin contamination in Times Beach, Mo., where residents have been evacuated after dioxin was found in the soil.

CBS News correspondent Bill Kurtis, co-anchor of the broadcast, said "once this building was the pride of Binghamton, N.Y., a monument to the future of a prosperous town. But something happened."

Kurtis, who has covered dioxin since the chemical was first discovered as a toxic contaminant of the defoliant Agent Orange, said Binghamton's plight was "less publicized, but no less dramatic" than other sites of dioxin contamination.

The CBS report, the first national TV coverage

of the tower crisis, interviewed Lois Whitemore, the security guard on duty when the fire broke out and who worked in what is now known to have been a contaminated space for a month.

"I'm waking up every morning wondering how much chemicals I have in my body that aren't supposed to be there," Whitemore said. "I'm scared."

Dr. Arnold J. Scheeter, Broome County health commissioner at the time of the fire, repeated his assertion the building will have to be torn down.

"If health considerations alone will prevail, probably this building will remain a sufficient health hazard so that it will never be used again," Scheeter said.

Hudacs said CBS News crew which prepared the report was given an opportunity to interview state officials, but declined the invitation.

Harold J. Kammerer, president of the Broome County Chamber of Commerce, said the report may have painted an unfair picture of the community, which he said is not true.

"What happened . . . has not created doom and gloom for Binghamton and Broome County."

Editorials

The Evening Press • Binghamton, N. Y.

Jan. 13, 1983 6-A

Bad report

THE ONLY voice of reason heard during yesterday's CBS Morning News report on the Binghamton State Office Building belonged to Dr. Kathleen A. Gaffney, Broome County Health Commissioner.

The rest of the segment was a textbook example of hysterical, one-sided, slap-dash journalism — long on doom-day generalities and short on objective, thoroughly researched specifics.

Where, for instance, were representatives of the state agencies handling the cleanup at the 16-story building? Their voices weren't heard. Instead, the state Office of General Services is publicly challenging the clean-up cost figures CBS used in its story.

CBS Morning News does some things well; reporting the Binghamton State Office Building story objectively isn't one of them. Unfortunately, it is this community — not CBS — which will have to suffer the consequences.

New air tests are ordered for State Office Building

By STEVE GEIMANN

State health officials ordered new air tests inside the contaminated Binghamton State Office Building yesterday after their equipment failed to find any trace of a deadly dioxin compound.

State Health Department officials said equipment analyzing five air samples taken in November on the 16th floor could not detect the most poisonous dioxin, tetrachlorodibenzo-dioxin. Officials said the equipment was not sensitive enough.

"We are not in a position to relate what these results mean," said Peter Slocum, a health department spokesman. Slocum said the sampling machines will take "a bigger gulp" of air to provide enough material for analysis.

Earlier this week, state officials said an analysis of the same air samples showed a second toxic chemical, tetrachlorodibenzofuran, was slightly above the level deemed safe for reusing the building.

Dr. Robert H. Huffaker, director, Office of Public Health, said tests for furan compounds prove the state can clean and test to the levels set by a 12-member panel of experts.

John L. Buckley, Broome County's consultant on the cleanup, said the unsuccessful dioxin test are understandable because such tests have never been conducted at such an infinitesimal level.

"No one has ever measured anything like this before," Buckley said.

The test showed dioxin levels below 1.1-trillionths of a gram of dioxin per cubic meter. The state has set a re-entry guideline of 0.2 of a trillionth of a gram per cubic meter.

State officials said they found levels measuring 16-, 12-, 13-, 8.2- and 7-trillionths of a

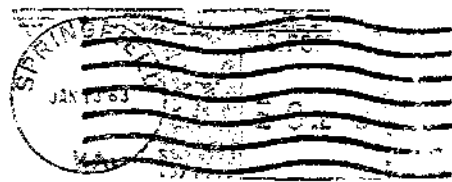
gram of furan per cubic meter in the air on the 16th floor. The state has set 8.4-trillionths of a gram of furans per cubic meter as the level for re-entering the tower.

Meanwhile, state officials protested a CBS News report yesterday which said New York has already spent \$15 million and could shell out \$30 million before the building reopens.

State officials said the Office of General Services spent \$7.8 million to clean and decontaminate the building and the health department spent \$686,200 for tests, or a total of \$8.7 million since the Feb. 5, 1961 fire.

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