

Thank You for using NewsLibrary

# SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

## IDENTITY OF COURT WORKERS WITH ASTHMA SOUGHT MOLDY BUILDING: COUNTY OFFICIAL SAYS EMPLOYEES WILL BE TRANSFERRED.

DATE: Saturday, May 15, 1999

Section: SECTION: Local

Page: 1B

BY TRACEY KAPLAN, Mercury News Staff Writer

Memo: SHORTER VERSION: page 1B, Morning Final edition.

**Illustration:** Photo

**Caption:** PHOTO: MERCURY NEWS FILE PHOTOGRAPH

Santa Clara County plans to move all employees and shut down the \$7.5 million courthouse in San Martin.

[990515 LO 1B]

Santa Clara County court officials Friday urged San Martin courthouse employees with asthma to identify themselves so they can be moved out of the mold-infested building.

"They've never come forward and asked to be moved," said court administrator Steve Love. "The county obviously has some liability here, and we absolutely want them to come forward."

An expert hired by the county recommended more than a week ago that employees with asthma be immediately moved out of the courthouse. The county is shutting down the \$7.5 million building because it is infested with a potentially toxic mold, *Stachybotrys atra*.

Several courthouse employees said Thursday that they had been told by their immediate supervisors that they could not leave until they got a doctor's note verifying their condition. One employee who has been diagnosed with asthma was moved late Thursday after the Mercury News inquired about the situation.

Love denied Friday that employees were told that a doctor's note was required. "Employees clearly could have misunderstood what we said," Love said. "We have a track record of erring on the side of caution since this situation started."

He said the courts had moved five employees out of the building even before the May 5 report by Dr. Joseph Jarvis, an occupational and environmental health expert, made his recommendation to immediately move employees with asthma.

The slimy, black mold can trigger reactions ranging from mild lower-respiratory infections, to, in extremely rare cases, bleeding lungs in infants. Moisture leaking through the courthouse roof, windows and walls has caused the mold.

The county hopes to start moving employees on May 28 to portable buildings set up on the courthouse site on Monterey Road. To determine the health risk facing employees, the county hired Jarvis, who is based in Salt Lake City.

Jarvis recommended that any courthouse employee who has contracted asthma since the building opened in 1995 or whose previous asthma condition has worsened should be immediately moved to another building.

"This is not all in their heads or manufactured," Jarvis said Thursday, adding that asthma rates among courthouse employees are twice as high as among a control group of other county employees. "This kind of asthma can become a chronic health problem even after a person is removed from exposure."

In addition to high rates of asthma, Jarvis also discovered a higher-than-normal rate of mold-related "sick-building syndrome," including headaches and eye, nose and throat irritation. But he said it is safe for employees who are suffering from that syndrome to remain in the courthouse. He based his conclusions on in-depth interviews with 16 courthouse employees, which he compared to interviews with employees in other county buildings.

---

---

All content © SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS and may not be republished without permission.

---

---

*All archives are stored on a SAVE (tm) newspaper library system from MediaStream Inc., a Knight-Ridder Inc. company.*