

FCPS Roofing Project FAQs

Roof work is an integral part of Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) construction and renovation projects and is necessary to properly maintain our facilities. Unfortunately, roofing odors are often generated during roofing projects due to the type of waterproofing materials used. This fact sheet addresses some frequently asked questions that FCPS staff, students and parents may raise. Additional product information, such as specific materials used and their safety data sheets (SDSs), are available upon request.

What safety measures are being taken to protect building occupants?

1. Roofing never occurs directly over occupied areas. Areas in FCPS buildings directly below roofing activities are cordoned off with caution tape, barriers and signage. FCPS Design and Construction (D&C) requests support of school administration in keeping students and other occupants out of these restricted areas until the project is complete.
2. A D&C representative is onsite whenever the roofing contractor is performing work. This representative strives to ensure that project materials are not stored near air handling unit roof intakes and that work does not occur over occupied areas.
3. Mechanical systems adjacent to the project area are shut down to prevent odors from entering the building.
4. During asphalt application, contractors use an odor suppressant (not a scented masking agent) that acts at the molecular level to retard the release of specific compounds in the asphalt. This additive retards the evaporation of lighter petroleum molecules, thus substantially reducing odors.

Is asbestos used on FCPS roofing projects.

No. FCPS requires that products used by its roofing contractors be asbestos-free.

I smell roofing odors. Does this mean I am being exposed to harmful fumes?

No. Some of the compounds in roofing asphalt (e.g., sulfur) have very low odor thresholds (in the parts per billion range). An odor threshold is the lowest concentration at which the odor of a substance can be detected, and this concentration is well below the levels associated with adverse health effects for these compounds. For building occupants and others in the proximity of a hot asphalt roofing job, smelling the odors of the asphalt does not, by itself, indicate a harmful exposure.

I experience physical symptoms when roofing odors are present. I have a headache, my eyes water, my nose and throat burn, and I feel nauseated. Is this a short-term effect, or can it result in chronic health problems?

These are short-term effects of exposure to roofing odors. Unfortunately, while these symptoms are unwelcome and unpleasant, they are temporary and can be relieved by seeking fresh air. Long-term health consequences are not a result of the levels of exposure found inside buildings during roofing projects.

What can I do to reduce my exposure to odors?

1. Stay out of restricted areas.
2. Keep windows closed during roofing activities.

What can Design and Construction do to help me?

FCPS D&C may be able to help building occupants by recommending additional controls to reduce odors and by facilitating cooperation between contractors and school administration. Contact your manager or Construction Liaison with additional questions; concerns will be fielded accordingly.