

Asbestos problem may cost CSI \$10M

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The City University of New York (CUNY) may pay as much as \$10 million — \$7 million more than originally expected — to remove asbestos from the site of the former Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook before it can be converted to the College of Staten Island's (CSI) new home, CSI President Edmond Volpe said.

Volpe said he did not know the reason for the increase in the estimated cost from \$3 million, but said the age of the buildings and the amount of asbestos was a part of the problem.

The Willowbrook site originally served as a hospital for servicemen injured during World War II, when asbestos was widely used as a fire retardant and to insulate heating and hot water pipes.

The site later became the Willowbrook State School and then the developmental center after revelations by the Advance about poor conditions at the state school for mentally retarded children and adults.

The situation, Volpe said, was complicated by a vast network of tunnels used to bring steam to the

last April that the old Willowbrook State School was "loaded" with asbestos and that the effort to remove it would be considerable.

The Office of General Services held title to the site prior to turning it over to the state Dormitory Authority several weeks ago. The Authority owns all State University of New York and CUNY campuses.

"All those buildings will have to be gutted," the official, who asked not to be identified, said.

Making the situation more difficult is the age and state of decay of some of the buildings, he said. Because of the poor conditions, "encapsulation" the easiest and most common method of asbestos removal, may not be feasible.

Destruction of buildings also requires removal of the asbestos before demolition, the official said, thus starting over from scratch is not a possible solution.

individual buildings from a central heating plant. The tunnels also contain large amounts of asbestos, he added.

Much of the cost of removing the substance, which is known to cause lung cancer and asbestosis, a lung disease that restricts breathing, stems from the fact that CSI needs to use 10 of the 12 existing buildings and will make at least partial use of the existing heating system, according to Volpe.

Volpe said he did not know the details of the asbestos removal or the reasons for the increased cost estimate.

CUNY officials also did not provide details of the removal costs. CUNY spokeswoman Rita Rodin said the price of removal may not reach the \$10 million mark.

Bids for the project are not due to be opened until next month, Ms. Rodin said, and that would determine the cost of the work. "There are a lot more firms doing asbestos removal now," she said, "and that will make the bidding a lot more competitive."

But a state Office of General Services official said