

# Asbestos bill soaring for CSI

## Cleanup may cost \$18.1M

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Only a month after College of Staten Island President Edmond Volpe said the cost of removing asbestos from the site of its new home in Willowbrook may go as high as \$10 million, the City University of New York (CUNY) has released documents showing it is prepared to pay \$18.1 million for the work.

The estimate appears as a calendar item for a CUNY Board of

Trustees meeting scheduled for next Monday.

When discussions about consolidating CSI's Sunnyside and St. George campuses at the site of the former Staten Island Developmental Center began several years ago, the cost of asbestos removal was pegged at \$3 million.

According to the calendar, the estimate had been reviewed and approved by CSI, CUNY's Office of Facilities Planning, Construction and Management and the

state Dormitory Authority.

The CUNY trustees' Committee on Fiscal Affairs, Facilities and Contract Review has recommended the estimate be accepted and that the Dormitory Authority issue bids for contracts to remove the asbestos.

The cost of the project will be covered by bonds already sold by the Dormitory Authority, according to an explanation of the project contained on the calendar.

The calendar also said the esti-

mate was prepared for CUNY by Edward Durrell Stone Associates, a consulting engineering firm with expertise in asbestos removal.

Robert Buxbaum, a spokesman for CUNY's Office of Facilities Planning, Construction and Management, denied the official estimate ever stood at \$10 million.

"There may have been a point in the discussions that somebody said, 'Hey, this is going to cost more than \$10 million,' and that stuck in President Volpe's mind," he said.

Volpe is out of town and could not be reached for comment.

Buxbaum said the difference

between the original \$3 million estimate and the \$18.1 million the CUNY trustees are being asked to approve stems from the university's lack of experience with asbestos removal.

"We had never conducted a project this size," he said.

Previous asbestos abatement projects, he said, were of limited scope. The CSI project involves virtually gutting structures built to serve as a hospital for injured World War II servicemen during an era when asbestos was used freely.

"There are several different types of asbestos at the site," he said, noting that it was mixed with

plaster in the ceilings of almost all the buildings and was used as insulation for heating and water pipes and coating for the massive utility pipes used to take heating steam from a central power plant to the buildings.

"Even if CSI had decided not to use this site, there would have been no savings because the state would still have the responsibility of removing the asbestos before the buildings were demolished," he said.

How much the Dormitory Authority, which holds legal title to the land, will have to pay for the

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asbestos removal won't be known until the contract is awarded.

The difficulties of fulfilling legal requirements for asbestos approval had made the work expensive in the past. Not only must special precautions be taken during the removal phase, but the air must be monitored during the process and the waste product disposed of in a proper hazardous-materials dump, he said.

There is hope, however, that the actual cost may come in below the estimate, he said. "There are more licensed asbestos removal firms than there used to be," he said. "Asbestos removal is the one field of construction where there's still a wide spread between the high and low bids. We can only hope the \$18 million figure is the high bid."

Louis Cenci, Staten Island's representative on the CUNY Board of Trustees, said he had questioned the \$18.1 million price tag and that it had been explained satisfactorily by CUNY employees supervising the project.

He also said that even with the high cost of removing the asbestos, moving to the Willowbrook site was still the most cost-efficient means of consolidating the college into one campus.

Cenci said he had been assured that the asbestos removal was the only major problem with the buildings at Willowbrook. "We've taken a look at the buildings and most of them are sound," he said.

In a December interview, CSI president Volpe said 10 buildings on the site were usable. Those that aren't will be demolished and two new buildings constructed.

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