



# Bermuda Union of Teachers

## Response to the Throne Speech, 2016

The BUT applauds the Government for its Throne Speech pledge to continue addressing health and safety concerns raised by the 2016 SCORE Report. We look forward to a detailed accounting of how issues outlined in the Report have been addressed. The BUT takes the position that much more must be done for the Ministry of Education to meaningfully address the myriad of health and safety challenges that exist throughout the Bermuda Public School System.

While SCORE reviewed Primary Schools in detail, there has been no review of health and safety conditions at the preschool, middle, or senior levels. In particular, the BUT is aware of two schools experiencing chronic conditions with strong potential to negatively impact the health of both staff and students. Too often, teachers must lead the charge for healthy working conditions, detracting from their focus on student learning. Concerns often go unheard until drastic measures are taken to bring attention to the matter. Mould contamination is a key concern in our schools. Note the graphic "Common Molds and Your Health" that briefly highlights the health risks faced by our students and staff in contaminated buildings.

The BUT calls on the Government and the Ministry of Education to stop its reactive approach to building management. **Bermuda's children deserve healthy and vibrant learning environments.** The BUT calls on the Government and Ministry of Education to implement comprehensive health and safety protocols that include: regular inspection of school buildings; a hotline or help desk contact specifically for reporting health and safety concerns; and schedules for air quality testing in all school buildings.



# COMMON MOLDS & YOUR HEALTH

	Characteristics	Where it Grows	Health Effects
<b>CLADOSPORIUM</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green, brown, grey, or black</li> <li>Powdery appearance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food</li> <li>Dead plants</li> <li>Wood</li> <li>Insulation</li> <li>Dark, damp environments like basements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can cause severe allergic reactions</li> <li>Harmful for people with asthma, allergies, and weakened immune systems</li> </ul>
<b>ASPERGILLUS</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grey, brown, yellow, green, white, or black</li> <li>Grows very quickly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walls</li> <li>Insulation</li> <li>Soil</li> <li>Clothing</li> <li>Humid, moist areas like leaky basements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can cause infections in people with weak immune systems</li> <li>Produces a carcinogen called aflatoxin</li> </ul>
<b>PENICILLIUM</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green, white, or blue</li> <li>Fuzzy appearance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food</li> <li>Walls</li> <li>Insulation</li> <li>Moist, organic matter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irritates the stomach if ingested</li> <li>Airborne spores can cause congestion, coughing, and eye irritation</li> </ul>
<b>ALTERNARIA</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dark green, grey, or black</li> <li>Long, velvety hairs</li> <li>Doesn't need as much water to grow as other molds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carpet</li> <li>Clothing</li> <li>Around windows</li> <li>Damp areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respiratory problems</li> <li>Asthma</li> <li>Hay fever</li> </ul>
<b>STRACYBOTRYS</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dark green or black</li> <li>Slimy</li> <li>Often referred to as "toxic black mold"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walls</li> <li>Ceilings</li> <li>Floor boards</li> <li>Any moist area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May cause cancer</li> <li>Headaches</li> <li>Asthma</li> <li>Dizziness</li> <li>Joint pain</li> </ul>

Sources:

<http://www.mouldfacts.ca/mold/household-mold.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/mold/stachy.htm>

<http://blackmold.awardspace.com/black-mold-toxic-stachybotrys-mycotoxins.html>

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## **Solutions to promote healthy schools:**

Simply put, the Government must make Healthy School buildings a priority. Bermuda's children deserve nothing less. 2010 rankings show Bermuda's education expenditure is 151st place in the world, spending 2.6% of GDP on education. This standing places us behind a wide range of nations including Ghana, New Zealand, Singapore, Kenya, Cuba, France, and Lesotho, which stands in first place with an expenditure of 13% of GDP. Education budgets have been slashed repeatedly since 2010, having a direct impact on our system's ability to meet its needs, and the resulting impact on building condition has been dire. To address the challenges, the Government must invest in our schools. Invest in our island's future.

**Strategy 1: Establish Protocols for Regular Inspection of School Buildings.** The BUT will support any initiative to establish protocols for regular inspection of school buildings. Inspection teams should be dispatched at a minimum of once per year, with industry standard protocols for documenting the condition of school buildings. Reports should be available to the public within a short time frame, as well as the results of any follow up inspections required after remedial work has been completed. The BUT supports both Teacher and parent involvement on inspection teams wherever possible.

**Strategy 2: Establish a direct contact for reporting health and safety concerns, and guidelines for having them addressed within expedient time frames.** Currently building administrators are primarily responsible for reporting issues with building condition to Department of Education facilities management personnel. This function should remain an administrative responsibility, but staff members and parents should also have access to a direct method of reporting health and safety concerns. Moreover, members of the school community should be encouraged to be proactive about reporting concerns promptly. Frequent reporting will facilitate a proactive and responsive approach to building management.

**Strategy 3: Establish protocols for regular air quality testing and health department certification.** Currently our community expects and indeed welcomes a wide range of safety certification. We expect elevator inspections to be posted, fire extinguishers in public buildings to be marked for working condition, cars and bikes are tested annually, and eateries must comply with health department regulations. The BUT calls for and would support initiatives to require active health and safety testing and Health Department occupancy certification in our buildings by an independent body. The conditions of school buildings must be conducive to learning. Acceptable air quality is a key condition for a healthy environment. Furthermore, neither the BUT nor the Bermuda Public can continue to rely on the word of a Minister to confirm that school conditions are acceptable for students. Formal certification of health standards in our schools is a must.

**Strategy 4: Establish Public Accountability Sessions for the reporting of this maintenance schedule.** Just as we have PAC meetings for other aspects of Government dealings, the results of the testing and the maintenance updates should be put in the [public domain to be promulgated to all stakeholders. The results should also be published on the school and Ministry of Education website.

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## A Healthy School Environment is The Government's Duty

Failure to put rigorous protocols in place for ensuring the health of our schools, will place the Ministry of Education in violation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1982, which states: 3(1) "It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all his employees. 3(2)(e) Without prejudice to the generality of an employer's duty under subsection (1) the matters to which that duty extends include in particular-- the provision and maintenance of a working environment for his employees that is, so far as reasonably practicable, safe without risks to health and adequate as regards facilities and arrangements for their welfare at work." The BUT challenges the Government to live up to it's motto... Children First!

### References and Further Readings

Bermuda Occupational Safety and Health Act, 1982. Retrieved November 25, 2016 from the World Wide Web  
<<http://www.bermulaws.bm/Laws/Consolidated%20Laws/Occupational%20Safety%20and%20Health%20Act%201982.pdf>>

Country Comparison: Education Expenditures. *The World Factbook*. Retrieved November 25, 2016 from the World Wide Web < <https://www.cia.gov/Library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2206rank.html>>

Indoor Air Facts 4. Sick Building Syndrome. Retrieved from the World Wide Wed November 26, 2016 < [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-08/documents/sick\\_building\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-08/documents/sick_building_factsheet.pdf)>