

Senate passes bill to remove dangerous lights from Oregon schools

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM-The Oregon Senate recently passed Senate Bill 479 that calls on schools to remove Type R metal halide lights from their buildings. The bill would not require school districts to replace the lights in stadiums and outdoor athletic fields.

“The current halide light bulbs do not belong in schools where students, educators, and the public can be unknowingly exposed,” said Senator Devlin (D-Tualatin).

Senate Bill 479 would prohibit the use of Type R metal halide light bulbs in schools. The bill stemmed from an incident that occurred in 2004 at Bryant Elementary School where 70 teachers were exposed to ultraviolet radiation from a Type R metal halide light bulb that had been damaged by a stray ball but had continued to function because only the outer glass was broken.

During the five and a half hours of sitting under the light the teachers were exposed to the equivalent of 41 days of UV radiation. The three teachers that were sitting directly under the light were all severely injured and continue to suffer from their injuries. Neither the school district nor the teachers knew that they were being exposed to the radiation.

While this type of incident is rare, it is not isolated.

According to the FDA, metal halide bulbs have an inner quartz tube that contains mercury vapor discharge, enclosed by an outer glass bulb that filters out harmful short-wavelength UV radiation. If the outer bulb breaks and the inner tube continues to operate unshielded, intense UV radiation is emitted. UV exposure at this level can cause eye and skin burns, as well as blurred or double vision, headaches, and nausea.

Under Senate Bill 479 school districts would be required to replace the Type R bulbs with either Type T self-extinguishing bulbs or other lighting types that do not pose a serious danger. Type T bulbs are self-extinguishing -- if the outer cover is broken they will turn off within 15 minutes.

Devlin stated on the floor that, "This is common sense legislation that protects students, teachers, and members of the community who spend time in areas where metal halide lights are present."

Senate Bill 479 will now move to the House for final consideration.

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