

# Worley School is not safe

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An inspection of the Lakeside Elementary School determined that the gymnasium roof cannot hold a significant snow load without the danger of collapse.

The release of building reports raised questions for the Plummer-Worley school board about the safety of the school and what action will be required within the next few months.

A state building inspector and structural engineer both reported that the failure of trusses supporting the roof is a serious safety hazard, which if confirmed by authorities, would force the school to fix the problem within a year.

School board members reviewed the reports completed by state building inspector Brad Ziel and engineer Robert Tate at a special meeting Monday. The two men were in attendance and voiced opinions about the safety of the school and raised questions about the future of the building.

Audience member Christine Rhea asked the men if they would allow their own children in the school.

"After Thanksgiving I wouldn't let them in the building," Mr. Tate said. Mr. Ziel agreed, saying the threat of a roof collapse would be heightened when the structure is stressed with snow loads.

By the end of the meeting, it seemed clear that the district would not allow children in the building once snow starts falling, but specific actions will not be discussed until the administrator of the Division of Building Safety, Kelly Pierce, releases a report on whether the roof is a safety hazard or not. Mr. Pierce's judgement will be based on the reports of Mr. Ziel and Mr. Tate.

The two men outlined their reports at the meeting.

While completing a yearly inspection of the school June 8 Mr. Ziel noted deficiencies such as dry rot and cracked walls that have been pointed out before in the old building. But when he inspected the attic above the gymnasium roof, he found wide cracks and twisting in the rafters and trusses that support the roof.

"I was shocked when I saw those girder trusses because in some of the cracks, you can see clear fresh wood," he said. "That tells me that there's a possibility that the cracks had gotten worse from the last snow load, and they may be increasing each time we get a snow load."

Mr. Ziel's report said that he considers these issues "serious hazards." According to the Idaho School Building Safety Act, a serious safety hazard is defined by Idaho administrative code as "a condition that presents an unreasonable health risk or risk of injury to occupants of a building must be corrected within a year. An imminent hazard "presents an unreasonable risk of death or serious bodily injury" to those inside the building and, if declared, immediately prevents anyone from entering the building until the hazard is gone.

The state report was supplemented by a report from Coeur d'Alene structural engineer Robert Tate. Mr. Tate agreed with Mr. Ziel's consideration that the cracked trusses constituted a serious safety hazard. His report said the roof "will not support any significant snow event (greater than 12") without the potential for failure."

"And we've all lived in this area long enough to know that that happens every year," he said at the meeting.

Mr. Tate also reported that two trusses above the gymnasium were "in failure mode," meaning they can't support the weight they were designed to hold. His report also said one other truss was "in imminent threat of failure."

Mr. Tate and Mr. Ziel said they thought there were eight trusses holding up the gymnasium roof. The trusses each support multiple rafters and are spaced 16 feet apart, bearing "thousands, tens of thousands of pounds," Mr. Ziel said.

Mr. Tate and Mr. Ziel are considered experts in their fields, but both men advised the board not to take action based on their considerations, since nothing is certain until Mr. Pierce submits the final report.

Mr. Ziel said at the meeting that he planned to submit his and Mr. Tate's reports to Mr. Pierce on Tuesday, giving the administrator a deadline of June 30 to give an answer to the board.

Mr. Ziel said the roof was weakened so much that if it were winter he would have labeled the building an imminent safety hazard.

"If I went and did this inspection last winter when we had a bunch of snow on that roof, and I went in there and saw those trusses, I would have been scared for my life being in there," he said.

Both men indicated that though there is no imminent threat of the roof collapsing now, that threat will likely exist once winter rolls around.

Several audience members voiced opinions to not allow children back in the building when school starts again in September. The board agreed to take action on the issue of finding appropriate space to house elementary students at their July meeting.

It seemed likely at the meeting that Mr. Pierce would agree with Mr. Ziel and Mr. Tate and declare the failed trusses a serious safety hazard, giving the district a year to eliminate the hazard.

If the district decided to fix the roof, it would be complicated and likely costly, but possible to finish within the year, Mr. Tate said. But he also made it clear that a quick fix would not solve the problem in the aging school.

"How much time do you want to buy? We could come up with a fix for the roof that will buy you some time in terms of funding," he said, pointing out that if the district does attempt a new building, it will take time to get funding, move students and complete a new building. "Are we looking at three, five, 10 years of this? There's always that old adage in Idaho that there's nothing more permanent than a temporary solution."

The board may call a special meeting once Mr. Pierce makes his determination, otherwise they will discuss the issue further at their July board meeting.