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## Tainted wood focus of study

**T**he leader of a Haverhill environmental group plans to meet with city officials this month to discuss his discovery of arsenic-treated wood in structures at two Haverhill parks.

Haverhill Environmental League Chairman **Brent Baesleck** surveyed eight city parks in June, following the May release of a national report titled, "Poison Playgrounds." The report, authored by the Washington-based Environmental Working Group and Healthy Building Network, contended that wood treated with copper chromium arsenate — a common preservative — poses a significant cancer risk to children. The Haverhill Environmental League is part of a statewide coalition that called on the governor to phase out the use of arsenic-treated wood in Massachusetts.

While Baesleck did not come across playground equipment constructed with arsenic-laced wood, he did find it in unpainted bleachers at four baseball diamonds at Riverside Park. He said the material, commonly called "pressure-treated" wood, is also present in an observation deck overlooking the Merrimack River at Riverside Park, and in picnic tables at Winnekenni Park, which is adjacent to Kenoza Lake — a city water supply.

"When you sit down on these bleachers, it's relatively common to put down your hands on the seat," Baesleck said, adding that snacking during a game could lead to ingestion of arsenic through hand-to-mouth contact.

A former construction materials salesman, Baesleck said he received training from a trade organization that serves wood preservative manufacturers. He identified arsenic-treated wood in two ways — by sight (on newer installations or areas protected from weathering, the wood is green tinged), and by trying to cut into undersurfaces with a sharp knife. Forcing chemicals into wood makes it up to three times denser than normal and hard to cut, he said.

In many cases, sealing pressure-treated wood with paint or polyurethane can avert potential

health hazards, Baesleck said, adding that he plans to discuss that option with Haverhill Recreation Director **Vincent Ouellette** and Water Department Supervisor **Bill Pauk**.

Baesleck said he also hopes to meet with Haverhill school officials to discuss potential playground problems.

Ouellette said he would probably try to confirm Baesleck's findings with companies that installed the equipment.

**Noteworthy**  
**LISA CAPONE**

"If they are confirmed, absolutely we would do something about it," he said.