

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional information contact:

Steve Alsum at (616) 456-9063 or steve@redproject.org

The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) has issued an order to prohibit the occupancy of 401 Hall SE, the main office location of The Grand Rapids Red Project. The order, issued late afternoon Thursday, May 19th, came after KCHD was notified by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that vapor levels in test samples performed by DEQ indicated above acceptable levels for human exposure to the chemical tetrachloroethylene (PERC).

The acceptable level of PERC in the air is 6 parts per billion (ppb). Testing in the main level of Red Project office space at 401 Hall SE revealed levels of 11 ppb in early May.

The health department said studies have shown that occupational PERC exposure may lead to a higher risk of bladder cancer, multiple myeloma or non-Hodgkin lymphoma, though the evidence for that is not very strong. KCHD stated that health problems requiring acute evaluations are not likely. According to Adam London, Health Officer at the Kent County Health Department, "A person who was a service recipient or a walk-in to one of those nonprofits or did some business there, it's not something they should be worried about."

The order to vacate the property at 401 Hall SE has placed a large burden on Red Project programming. Approximately 50% of harm reduction services take place at the Hall St SE location, in addition to testing services and client appointments. Moving programmatic and administrative infrastructure is a serious set-back to ongoing efforts to prevent HIV, Hepatitis C and overdose in the city of Grand Rapids.

The duration of the order to prohibit occupancy at 401 Hall St SE is still unclear. Red Project is waiting on further guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), DEQ, and ultimately the determination of KCHD according to Michigan's Public Health Code on occupancy of the building. It is unclear whether occupancy will be permitted within two weeks or six months.

Red Project is committed to continuing to share information as it is received from EPA, DEQ, and KCHD. A community meeting will be hosted by LINC on Wednesday, May 25th at 6 pm at 1167 Madison Ave SE.

In the interim, daily harm reduction services have been moved to 343 Atlas Ave SE. Services include syringe access, recovery coaching, safer sex supplies, and overdose prevention training, which will operate Monday through Thursday from 12 to 5pm. Weekly rapid HIV and Hepatitis C testing events have also been moved to the Atlas Avenue location, Monday and Thursday, from 1 to 3:30pm. All regularly scheduled weekly outreach sites are still fully operational.

Red Project requests that the community bear with us in this difficult time of transition and is grateful to The Grand Rapids Pride Center for their support. At this point, Red Project needs assistance in identifying temporary office space to lodge employees. If Red Project is unable to re-occupy 401 Hall SE in a timely manner, there will be a significant loss of not-for-profit investment in infrastructure and the time, energy, and effort of our employees and numerous volunteers.