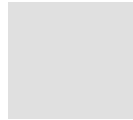


# Sussex County school to close due to unsafe power lines near playground

Posted Sep 8, 2009



By [Michael Rispoli/The Star-Ledger](#)

NEWTON -- As PSE&G seeks state approval to build a high-voltage power line through four New Jersey counties, reviving a heated debate about the safety of electromagnetic fields, officials in one Sussex County town say they have no choice but to close their only school because of elevated EMF levels produced by lines already in place.

School administrators in Fredon say they learned over the summer the high-voltage lines crossing the playground of the Fredon School were producing EMF levels that far exceed recommended safety standards. As a result, the K-6 school will close Oct. 1, Superintendent Sal Constantino wrote in a letter to parents today.

---

---

## **Aristide Economopoulos/The Star-Ledger**

Fredon School students running around outside during gym class today. The school board announced will be closed Oct. 1 due to high electromagnetic levels being emanated from power lines near the playground.

In an interview, school board President John Flora said the district was "erring on the side of caution" in shutting the school, which serves 343 students. Officials are now scrambling to find alternate classroom space.

"We cannot continue to have our children exposed to dangerous EMF levels every day that they sit in a classroom or play on our playground," Flora said. "Our continuous goal has been the safety of the children."

The move comes as Public Service Electric & Gas, the state's biggest utility, seeks approval from the Board of Public Utilities to build a 500-kilovolt line along a 45-mile stretch, from Susquehanna, Pa., to Roseland in Essex County. A 230-kilovolt line -- the one that passes the Fredon School -- has been in place along the same route since the 1930s.

The proposal, which PSE&G maintains is vital to upgrading capacity, has met steep opposition in several communities, with residents and elected officials saying they worry about the effects of longterm exposure to electromagnetic fields. EMFs

can be produced by any electrical appliance but are sometimes more concentrated around high-voltage power lines, substations and other facilities that produce or transfer large amounts of electricity.

---

Despite decades of research into EMFs, scientists have not conclusively determined whether they're harmful. Some studies have found a "weak" link to leukemia in children, while others have not, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the National Institutes of Health.

PSE&G spokeswoman Karen Johnson today stressed the lack of a definitive link.

"The scientific organizations and health agencies that have reviewed the research have not concluded that EMFs cause cancer or any other disease," Johnson said.

EMF levels are measured in milligauss, or mG. The World Health Organization recommends a maximum exposure of 3

mG. Over the summer, Fredon school officials said, PSE&G found EMF levels with a median value of 19.34 mG on the playground.

Joseph Dumanov, a certified EMF technologist from Sparta in Sussex County, called the electrical hot spot in Fredon "an unacceptable amount."

"They need to get to levels as low as they possibly can," Dumanov said.

At the same time, he said, people shouldn't be "terrorized" by electromagnetic fields in general, noting the possibility of damage depends on the intensity of the dose and the length of exposure. Because EMF levels around power lines fluctuate with electricity usage, levels are sometimes very low, he said.

---

---

The Fredon school board and Parents Against the Lines (PAL), a local group that opposes the new power line, had been negotiating with PSE&G to move the existing lines farther away

from the school and, in the short term, to move the playground from the back of the school to the front to minimize EMF exposure.

School officials contend an agreement was about to be signed on the reconfiguration when PSE&G backed out, saying it wanted to wait until it received state approval for the new power line. The school board then voted to close the school.

"I am not putting my children or any other children back in the school until the power lines are moved," school board member Courtney Wisinski said. "We thought PSE&G was committed to do that, but they backed out."

Johnson said the utility remains willing to move the lines as part of the Susquehanna-Roseland project, which is not expected to be in service until 2012, but not because of health concerns.

"PSE&G remains willing to move the proposed line further away from the school to lessen the construction impact of the new line," she said. "The realignment is contingent, however, on BPU approval of the project."

*Staff writers Mark Mueller and Tanya Drobness contributed to this report.*