

LPOSD declares emergency over failing Clark Fork septic system

By LUCY DUKES
Staff writer
April 23, 2004

SANDPOINT -- A septic system failure at Clark Fork Junior/Senior High School forced the Lake Pend Oreille School Board to declare a state of emergency on Thursday.

The emergency declaration was necessary because the district needed to make the repairs in less time than a normal bid process takes -- six to eight weeks -- and projects costing more than \$25,000 must be put out to bid unless an emergency is declared, explained district maintenance supervisor Sid Rayfield.

"We couldn't have a sewage system perking to the surface for six to eight weeks," Rayfield said.

"We reacted to this as quickly as possible."

Repairs began Thursday, and will continue until next Wednesday. Students will use portable toilets until the beginning of next week, when half the system's drainfield should be functional.

The repairs are necessary because effluent from the septic system is seeping to the surface in an area roughly a few thousand square feet, said Superintendent Mark Berryhill.

About five or six weeks ago, wet spots were noticed, and the district advised Panhandle Health District of the problem, said Rayfield.

The district fenced the area and put lye on it, even though it's not in a location used much by students during school, said Berryhill.

"We still have a concern after school and on the weekend," he said.

Initially, Rayfield believed some of the septic system lines, installed in 1989, had been driven on and were broken.

Upon inspection, workers found a smaller size gravel than is recommended for the drainfield and found pipes -- which are supposed to run level or at a slight incline -- running uphill, Rayfield said.

The district leveled pipes and put in larger gravel, but it didn't work, he added.

To fix the problem, the district must now replace the entire drainfield for \$24,000-\$30,000.

"It needed to happen as quick as possible," said Rayfield.