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State to assess school district, energy management company for unsafe boiler

(Salem) — The Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services Building Codes Division has proposed civil penalties totaling \$16,000 against North Clackamas School District and Boise-based Clima-Tech Corporation related to an unsafe boiler at Lot Whitcomb Elementary School.

“Overheated boilers can explode, causing serious injuries and damage to buildings,” said Patrick Allen, acting administrator of the Building Codes Division. “We want to remind school districts to perform regular maintenance on their boilers, address problems immediately, and make sure only qualified personnel work on them.”

The penalties in this case stem from two instances in late 2009 when the school's boiler overheated, activating the fire alarm. In both cases, after checking the boiler, the school determined that the safety controls were inoperable yet continued to operate the boiler. The boiler controls were tied into an energy management system installed by Clima-Tech Corporation. Further investigation found that the system was wired incorrectly, which caused the boiler's safety controls to be inoperable. The district since has rewired the system to work correctly. Both parties have the opportunity to request a hearing.

The Building Codes Division encourages school districts and other organizations with boilers in their facilities to take the following precautions:

- Make sure that inspection and maintenance schedules are in place and adhered to.
- Ensure that trained individuals are regularly checking all boiler gauges, monitors, and equipment settings.
- Ensure that an up-to-date maintenance log is kept in the room with the boiler.
- Post contact numbers for the person or company responsible for maintaining the boiler, so that people with questions know who to contact.
- If a boiler is emitting steam or smoke, evacuate the building immediately and call 911.

Organizations also should be aware that energy management systems might affect the safety of their boiler, the division added.

“Energy management systems are growing in popularity and can help achieve energy efficiency and cost savings; however, organizations must make sure these systems do not interfere with the safe operation of boilers and other equipment,” Allen said.

The Building Codes Division inspects and issues permits for both boilers and pressure vessels. For more information, go to <http://www.cbs.state.or.us/bcd/programs/boiler.html>. The division is part of the Department of Consumer and Business Services, Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, go to www.dcbs.oregon.gov.