

Ditto sheets in schools hazardous

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Those smelly, purple-ink sheets that teachers regularly crank out on low-tech ditto machines may be hazardous to everyone's health, says the American Federation of Teachers.

Darryl Alexander, AFT's workplace health and safety director, says a brief study found that ditto machine fluid has excessive amounts of methanol, a highly volatile alcohol.

A spot check of schools from California, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Michigan, the District of Columbia, Louisiana and Oklahoma found that ditto machines are still in frequent use.

Alexander says exposure to methanol in schools can be much higher than levels allowed in workplaces by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Methanol has a "high odor threshold" and by the time you smell it, "you've already been overexposed," she says.

The AFT study was prompted by teacher complaints of headaches, nausea and other ailments. Alexander proposes a survey to find how prevalent ditto machines are and gauge potential health problems.