

The Blog

General Registrar addresses boiler issues

Selna Shi, Public Relations Specialist

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In the late night **last Wednesday** around 1 A.M., an employee at CSX, the railroad company next to our office, saw an unusual amount of smoke coming out of the office building. The CSX employee phoned the fire department and around 3 A.M., Brian Prince, the health and safety manager was called.

“When I walked into the building, I was wearing a mask, but my face immediately started itching,” Brian said.

The building was filled with diesel gas coming from the boiler. When the firefighters arrived, they broke in, turned off the boiler, and began airing out the toxic fumes.

Our office was built in 1976. With the old age of the heating system, the boiler became clogged and imploded.

Fortunately, nothing in the building was caught on fire and no one was hurt.

“Shoutout to the employee at CSX. We avoided a catastrophe. If the boiler caught on fire then who knows what would’ve happened,” General Registrar Keith Balmer said. “We have not just Early Voting going on but also we have millions of dollars worth of equipment in the building.”

The office was shut down last Wednesday, but reopened the following Thursday at 10 A.M. When our office employees walked in, the windows were cracked open and fans were blowing in every room to air out the fumes.

However, an hour after our office reopened, some employees reported tightness in the chest, headache, and dizziness. Keith shut down the building and Early Voting at noon to not further risk the health of our employees.

As required by Virginia law §24.2-310, in the case of an emergency at a polling place, the general registrar must provide an alternative polling place.

“I didn’t have a plan B for Early Voting and the silver lining to all of this [situation] is that I had to put a plan B in place,” Keith said. “If something like this ever happens again, we have a plan. Early Voting won’t be affected because we can just swiftly move it to City Hall now.”

City Hall became the emergency location starting last Friday and continued to be the following Monday and Tuesday, while a company was hired to do air quality checks throughout the office.

The tests came back to be normal air quality for an office building and it was deemed safe for employees to return to the office by Wednesday. In the meantime, the building is being heated by a mobile heater and we are expecting to have a new boiler installed in the near future.

Luckily, changing the location did not negatively impact Early Voting since we were able to notify the public about the sudden change.

Our team is grateful for the unplanned time off, but we were ready to return to the office as the workload was piling up. The office is once again the polling location for Early Voting.

We are filled with gratitude that no one was hurt and our building is still here. We would like to thank the individual for noticing the smoke, the firefighters who helped us navigate through the situation, and our employees who made sure the building is safe again.