

A fire last week at Green Bay Preble High School was caused by spontaneous combustion, authorities said. Smoke damage has forced school officials to delay the Sept. 2 start of the school year. (Aug. 11, 2014)

**Nathan Phelps and Patti Zarling, Press-Gazette Media** 6:23 a.m. CDT August 12, 2014



(Photo: Evan Siegle/Press-Gazette Media)

A fire at Preble High School caused by spontaneous combustion due to improperly disposing chemical-laden rags will delay the start of school.

Students had been scheduled to return to school on Sept. 2, but damage to the gym — as well as smoke damage through much of the school — has delayed that until cleanup is completed. A damage estimate was not available on Monday.

Administrators are considering options for instructing students until they can return to class, Preble principal Natasha Rowell said. She did not say whether classes would be conducted online, in other buildings or delayed.

**Poll:** [How should the school district handle the start of classes at Preble? \(http://archive.greenbaypressgazette.com/poll/2014-08-12/8240588\)](http://archive.greenbaypressgazette.com/poll/2014-08-12/8240588)

**Updates:** [More information on cleanup efforts \(http://preblerestoration.wordpress.com\)](http://preblerestoration.wordpress.com)

"We will need to make up those days," she said. Teachers will be allowed into the school to gather personal belongings, she said.

Maintenance crews improperly stored rags covered with chemicals used to redo floors, Green Bay School District officials said Monday.

A surveillance camera caught the spontaneous combustion on tape, Lt. Nick Craig, spokesman for the Green Bay Metro Fire Department. No one broke into the building and the fire was not intentionally set, he said.

About three-quarters of the school's bleachers were damaged, Craig said. There were no sprinklers in the gym.

Crews worked over the weekend to clean up the damage, starting with the library and locker rooms, said J. Murphy of Paul Davis National, which is doing the work. Crews will work around the clock, he said, and up to 400 people are expected to be part of the effort.

A portion of Danz Avenue in front of the school will be closed during some of the work.

Many parents and families have stopped by the school volunteering to help with the effort, Murphy said.

"We appreciate it, but there really isn't anything you can do," he said. "The best thing you can do is stay away."

Clerical staff and operations have been moved to the district offices at 200 South Broadway, Rowell said. Registration will occur there, she said.

Fire crews were called to the school early Friday and had to spend about 90 minutes finding and extinguishing a fire in the bleachers in the gymnasium. Smoke damage was present throughout the building and restoration crews have been brought in to work around-the-clock. Craig said the fire occurred at about 1 a.m.

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