



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-313

A boiler in a BIE classroom building failed inspection because of elevated levels of carbon monoxide gas.

Failed Inspection and Significant Delays in Repair of Boilers Endangered Students and Staff at a BIE School

- At one school we visited, 7 of a school’s 11 boilers failed inspection in 2015 due to various high- risk deficiencies, including elevated levels of carbon monoxide and a natural gas leak. Four of the boilers are located in a student dormitory, and 3 are located in classroom buildings. All but one of the boilers are about 50 years old.
- The inspection report designated most of these boiler deficiencies as critical hazards that posed an imminent danger to life and health, which required the school to address them within a day. The report also identified a gas leak affecting one of the dormitory boilers, which required the school to respond within 15 days. Several of these deficiencies were repeat items that had not been abated since the prior year’s inspection.
- Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas, which can cause poisoning where there is exposure. According to Indian Affairs officials, it is typically measured in the exhaust stack of the boiler. Natural gas is the fuel supply for the boiler, and a leak in the supply line can present an explosion hazard.
- School officials told us they continued to operate the boilers and use the dormitory after the inspection because there was no backup system to substitute for the boilers or other building available to house the students. About 6 months after Indian Affairs’ boiler inspection, the school contacted a tribal utility authority to examine the boilers. The utility authority identified multiple gas leaks in the dorm and considered them dangerous to students and staff. As a result, the boilers were shut down, and the school evacuated the students and closed the dormitory for about 2 to 3 weeks to conduct emergency repairs of the gas leaks.
- Most of the boiler repairs were not completed for about 8 months following Indian Affairs’ inspection. Significant delays in boiler repairs prolonged the safety and health risks to students and staff. Indian Affairs and school officials could not provide us with an explanation for why repairs took significantly longer than Indian Affairs’ required time frames. Further, according to the most recent information agency officials provided us in December 2015, none of the repaired boilers had been inspected by a certified boiler inspector, as required by Indian Affairs.

Source: GAO analysis of Indian Affairs information and documentation. | GAO-16-313