

Hopi Guidance Center seeks new office space as old Toreva office has environmental health issues

The Hopi Guidance Center (HGC) staff was told to evacuate the administration and social service buildings located in Toreva on Wed. May 14 due to environmental issues. The HGC staff was told to relocate to the Hopi Tribal Complex in Kykotsmovi.

Tressa Poleyestewa, Business Manager for HGC said the justification for the removal was an environmental health issue.

Previous to the removal, Evergreen Home Inspections had done an assessment on the HGC buildings. HGC never received a formal response from the home inspectors to the findings of the buildings.

According to Donovan Gomez, Executive Director for the Hopi Tribe said the environmental issue had been ongoing for the past two weeks.

"Employees were getting sick and due to the warm weather there was an increase in rodent activity," said Gomez.

Richard Hamilton, HGC Director, shut the place down and sent his staff to a medical facility for medical clearance, after which he called the Hopi Tribe's facility office to clean up the buildings.

During the clean up, one of the Facility workers had gotten a nose bleed because the odor was so strong.

After that incident, Executive Director Gomez told Hamilton that no one was allowed to go back into the buildings and directed Hamilton to get an exterminator.

Mammoth Exterminators were called in to do the assessment. The estimated cost of extermination would be between \$8-12,000. They would need to remove carpets and walls to determine how bad the problem is.

A meeting was held between the Vice Chairman's office, Executive Directors office, and Finance to discuss the finances issues surrounding extermination and building rehab. All offices agreed they were not going to put any more money into fixing up the buildings.

Gomez said the buildings had been labeled as condemned in 2005 or '06 and should not have been occupied.

Now, the goal is to find a location for the HGC program. There was talk about moving the HGC staff to the Tewa/Sichomovi youth building in First Mesa, however the youth program will be moving in this summer.

Currently, HGC is temporarily placed at the Tribal Complex in the Department of Administration and Technical Service's (DATS) conference room where they are expected to stay for two weeks. However, according to Gomez, the HGC staff might stay at the locations longer than expected.

The Hopi Guidance Center had nine offices located at Toreva and must now find space to continue their services. Much of the work they deal with is confidential cases and is a consideration in finding office space.

The offices that have been displaced are the Administration Office, Transportation, TANF, Veteran Services, Social Services, Child Protective Services, Foster Care, General and Burial Assistance, Child Abuse Program. A total of 28 employees work in these offices and have come together as a team to make the best of the situation they are in.

"Client confidentiality is a big issue for us right now," said Poleyestewa. "And contact. We receive scan reports from outside agencies daily and we don't have any of that right now."

Poleyestewa added that they will continue to provide services and do the best they can to accommodate their clients.

The Hopi Tribe's MIS office is working to get HGC staff the technology they need; i.e. telephone, fax and internet.

"We are standing behind our employees and looking out for their health. This is short term and we are working diligently in finding them another location," said Vice Chairman Lomahquahu.