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'There's sewage covering the floors' at EPA headquarters

By: Robin Bravender and Kevin Bogardus



There's a leak at U.S. EPA headquarters.

A plumbing problem put sewage on the floors at the agency's Washington headquarters earlier today.

Wastewater was spilling onto the third floor of the William Jefferson Clinton Federal Building, according to sources inside and outside the agency. The Depression-era building is known to have plumbing problems.

"There's sewage covering the floors in the north building of headquarters," an EPA employee said. There have been reports of overflows outside EPA's policy shop, which is on the same floor but down a long hallway from Administrator Scott Pruitt's office.

Headquarters staff received an email just before 9 a.m. with "Facilities update" in the subject line warning of plumbing problems and assuring employees the General Services Administration was on the case.

"There is a water line back up in the William Jefferson Clinton North Building that is causing the hallway water fountains to leak throughout the building in the 400 and 500 Corridors," the email said. "GSA is working this issue right now. There is no estimated time for resolution."

This afternoon, another EPA employee said, "They have cleaned it all up." That person noticed yellow "wet floor" signs in the hallways.

The employee, speaking with colleagues, heard there had been black sludge coming out of the water fountains, whose odor wafted into adjacent offices.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, said he was told "a sewer problem at EPA HQ has resulted in poop exploding out of water fountains" outside the policy office.

Plumbing problems at headquarters are not new.

"Sometimes there were some very odd smells coming out of those drinking fountains," said a former agency official who worked on the third floor. That person said there were water stains on the marble floors and an occasional drinking water backup.

"I can't imagine that anyone would actually drink out of those drinking water fountains," the official said. "I think I used it to pour my coffee down."

Other EPA offices have had sewage problems. For weeks beginning in December 2013, clogged toilets and other bathroom misbehavior was reported in the agency's Region 8 office in Denver, although a disgruntled employee was suspected to be the cause rather than bad plumbing (Greenwire, Aug. 21, 2014).

EPA press officials didn't respond to questions about the leak.