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Mold crisis may bring 2 Berlins together

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The mold that caused the recent evacuation of the municipal complex here may lead borough officials to abandon the nearly century-old structure altogether.

The chances of demolition vs. remediation are "about 50/50," said borough administrator Charleen Santora.

The crisis also could lead to a cooperative building venture, or even union, with neighboring Berlin Township.

Meanwhile Santora reported no complaints of mold-related illness from borough employees.

Samples showed "extremely high levels" of two types of mold in the basement that housed the police department, according to Nancy Wilson, an environmental health specialist for Camden County.

Those types of mold -- *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus versicolor* -- "are known to produce mycotoxins which can cause health effects in individuals predisposed to allergies," she wrote in an April 9 letter to borough officials.

Borough Police Chief Bob Carrara said his main concern is with "long-term problems five to 10 years from now, as opposed to today."

Some of his officers expressed concern about "coming home with contaminants on their uniforms," the chief said, but were assured by county officials that "that was not something to be concerned with."

Berlin Township Mayor Phyllis Jeffries-Magazzu said officials from the two municipalities have "talked briefly" about constructing a new building together, "just to see if its a possibility."

Talks were expected to continue at a meeting of the township's governing body Monday night.

"It would save us both money," the mayor said of a joint building. "We could both use common areas such as the courtroom or the holding cells."

The township, which lost its municipal building to decay a year and a half ago, now operates out of several trailers and a senior citizens hall.

Jeffries-Magazzu called outright union with the borough "a possibility somewhere down the road."

The borough, which evacuated the borough hall two weeks ago, now is soliciting proposals for remediation.

"Once the governing body sees what is needed to correct the situation, it will have to make a decision

on whether to move forward," Santora said. She said she expected the borough to be able to correct the problem and return to the building, but could not guarantee that outcome.

"It could be a number that's astronomical," she said. "Berlin is going to come up with the best feasible solution for its employees and residents."

Originally found in the basement, mold was later discovered in ceilings and along pipes throughout the building.

Remediating the problem will likely include replacement of wall board, ceilings, furring strips and insulation, as well as repairs to the roof, foundation, air conditioning systems and other sources of moisture, according to a study done for the borough by Environmental Testing Consultants of Cherry Hill.

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