

# Teacher from toxic Bronx school to sue after losing her baby to birth defect

Nancy Tomassi's school, PS 51, was laden with carcinogen trichloroethylene

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RICHARD HARBUS FOR DAILY NEWS

Teacher Nancy Tomassi, seen with husband Michael, blames unborn child's fatal birth defect on sick Bronx school.

A TEACHER WHO worked at a toxic Bronx school lost her baby to birth defects linked to the contamination, she charged Wednesday in legal papers.

In October, five months into her pregnancy, [Nancy Tomassi](#), a fifthgrade teacher at the shuttered Public School 51, learned her baby had a malformed brain, a condition called anencephaly, and would not survive.

The tests done in January showed that the sick school was laden with the carcinogen trichloroethylene, a toxin linked to defects, but failed to warn students or teachers until July.

"The whole tragic nature of the situation was made worse by the fact it could have been avoided if the Department of Education had acted properly," said Tomassi's lawyer [Jeff Schietzelt](#), with the firm Silverson, Pareres & Lombardi. He notified the city of her intent to sue on Wednesday.

"How could they have known since January and not have told us?" said [Mike Tomassi](#), Nancy's husband. "You're heartbroken and at some point you're angry."

For Tomassi, the diagnosis meant she had to end the pregnancy.

When researching possible causes, she found information to suggest the toxic chemical found at the sick school was responsible for her tragedy.

"If wed known about this, things could have been different," said Tomassi, who worked at the school for five years.

Roughly one in every 4,859 babies born in the U.S. have the birth defect anencephaly, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but it is often unclear what causes it.

But there is evidence that TCE increases problems in fetal development, said [Lenny Siegel](#), executive director of the Center for Public Environmental Oversight.

The city "should have tested the school years ago," he said. "They shouldn't put schools in industrial buildings, and they should have notified people as soon as they knew there was a problem."

City Law Department spokeswoman [Elizabeth Thomas](#) promised the agency would review the claim when "we receive an official copy."