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Detecting restraint

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It appears Waukegan Unit School District 60 is taking a page from Waukegan city officials when it comes to public monies. City officials continue to pass on millions in federal grant funds to clean up Waukegan Harbor, while school officials have mothballed about \$137,000 worth of metal detectors which were installed last year at the Upper Grade Center, the old Waukegan West campus.

City officials have their arguments against ignoring the windfall from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to dredge polychlorinated biphenyls deposited by Outboard Marine Corp. from the north harbor. Waukegan wants to get rid of the remaining heavy industry as part of moving toward marina and residential development; the EPA wants the harbor to remain a deep-water port, although from its latest proposal -- capping the PCB-laden bottom -- that plan may have been shelved.

While we understand the city-EPA give and take, the school district is another matter. School officials contend the metal detectors at the three entrances to the Upper Grade Center provided a false sense of security. If that's the case, casting them off provides even less security. As students are wont to do, they figured out the system soon after the metal detectors were installed in July 2006 at the behest of former Principal Edward Guerra. He has since left.

But under the tenure of Guerra, a veteran of the Chicago Public Schools system, the district bought 11 walk-through metal detectors, 12 detection wands and five X-ray scanning systems. All for naught, it seems.

There's a reason for metal detectors. Students and faculty may gripe about ineffectiveness, long lines and the time it takes, but they serve a purpose. The Transportation Security Administration relies on them to keep our airlines safe. Are they inconvenient? Of course, but in the hands of trained security they pose a deterrent. Two other area high schools, North Chicago and Zion-Benton, routinely use them.

School officials seem not prepared to reinstate the use of the detectors so maybe they can trade or sell them to another school district willing to use them. That way, District 60 taxpayers will get something for their money. If not, taxpayers should be glad to know the district is awash in public funds.

OUR VIEW