

Sumas Mountain Asbestos Sampling Fact Sheet - August 2010



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10 August, 2010

During the week of August 23rd, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) are planning to conduct activity-based air sampling, stationary air sampling, soil sampling, and surface water sampling at several locations along the Sumas River. Whatcom Health Department, EPA, ATSDR, and other health agencies are concerned about potential health risks due to asbestos in the area. We are collecting samples to help people better understand the risks and protect their families.

When the Sumas River flooded in January 2009, many areas were covered in water. In some locations, the water left deposits of mud from Sumas River. These flood deposits contain naturally occurring asbestos carried by runoff from a landslide on Sumas Mountain. The agencies are concerned because when people inhale asbestos fibers, the fibers can increase the risk of asbestos-related disease. Dry or windy weather and activities that create dust can affect how much asbestos gets into the air where people can breathe it. Information collected during sampling will help health agencies give residents and workers the best advice about how to reduce exposure.

Why are we sampling?

- The activity based sampling of flood deposits will help us determine whether ordinary outdoor activities along the Sumas River create a significant health risk to people living in these areas.
- Air sampling from fixed stations will help show whether there is more risk during different weather conditions.
- Overall, the sampling will help us:
 - Better understand the potential health risks faced by residents and workers.
 - Advise people who work near or live next to flood deposits about steps they can take to limit exposure to the asbestos.
 - Determine whether the level of risk associated with the flood deposits varies by location or weather conditions.

What to expect?

Sampling teams of eight people will spend about eight hours in each of three yards. They will be wearing white protective clothing and respirators during the sampling. Federal health and safety rules require them to use this protective gear. Property owners have given us permission to collect samples.

Samples will be collected at several locations where the 2009 floods left mud that contains asbestos. Workers will rake or do other activities that disturb the soil to simulate everyday activities. Monitoring equipment attached to their protective gear will sample the air as they work. The samples will be sent to a lab and tested for asbestos.



This work is similar to sampling done in 2006 along Swift Creek.

Air sampling over the course of a year

ATSDR will continue to take air samples at up to five locations in the area. These samples will be taken on different days during the year, in places where wind, traffic, or other disturbances could raise asbestos fibers into the air. Some samples will be taken near areas known to contain asbestos and some farther away.

Status of flood control

This fall, Whatcom County will repair flood control structures on parts of Swift Creek using county flood control funds and a grant from the Department of Ecology. This year's work is intended to help keep Swift Creek within its current channel. But it will not prevent continued movement of asbestos along Swift Creek and Sumas River. The county continues to work with federal and state agencies on a long-range plan for controlling the asbestos problem, as funding allows. Having more information will help federal, state and local governments prioritize potential solutions to asbestos erosion and transport from Sumas Mountain.

Questions?

If you have questions about the **activity based sampling effort**, please contact:

Ellie Hale
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
206-553-1215 or 1-800-424-4372 x1215
hale.ellie@epa.gov

If you have questions about the **stationary air sampling effort**, please contact:

Karen L. Larson, Ph.D.
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
Email KXL5@cdc.gov
206-553-6978

To learn more about the **air quality** around your home and inquire about **free indoor air sampling**, please contact:

Mark Asmundson
Northwest Clean Air
(800) 622-4627 ext. 0
masmundson@nwcleanair.org

For information on how to **minimize exposure** to naturally occurring asbestos **in the workplace**, please contact:

David Johnson
Washington Department of Labor and Industries
(360) 902-5514
JODA235@LNI.WA.GOV

For information related to the **County's activities**, please contact:

Jeff Hegedus
Whatcom County Health Department
(360) 676-6724 ext. 50895
jhegedus@co.whatcom.wa.us