

Tests Show No Health Threat from ‘Libby’ Asbestos

Western Minerals Product Superfund Site
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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For more information

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The loading dock of the former Western Mineral Products facility, seen from the Jefferson Street side of the building. The area shown with tarp is where the piles of waste material (known as “stoner rock”) were located.

After cleaning up asbestos from the yards at more than 260 northeast Minneapolis properties, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency did an indoor air assessment to find out if the air inside these homes contains asbestos fibers of the type known as “Libby” asbestos. Libby asbestos comes from vermiculite ore mined in Libby, Montana, and processed at the former Western Minerals Product/W.R. Grace plant, which operated at 1720 Madison St. N.E., from the late 1930s to the late 1980s.

EPA selected 52 residences at 37 properties in the Logan Park and Sheridan neighborhoods for testing based on outdoor sample results and proximity to the Western Minerals plant. Four had no detectable Libby asbestos on their exterior and were considered as reference homes for comparison. The other 48 had exterior Libby asbestos contamination that was cleaned up by EPA. Indoor tests were done to see if asbestos fibers were present, and if found, were they the type found in Libby vermiculite.

Indoor air sampling results

In September 2008, EPA collected and analyzed air samples and dust samples from inside the selected properties. Asbestos fibers were found in 23 of the 52 residences, but at levels not considered a health threat. Most were associated with asbestos used in building materials, such as pipe wrap, insulation, flooring and siding. It is not uncommon to find these types of asbestos fibers in homes of this age. Libby asbestos fibers were found in 14 homes, but at very low levels. None of the dust samples contained Libby asbestos.

Residents at all sampled homes received a letter from EPA with their sampling results. They were told if any action was needed and where to go for further assistance. EPA shared results with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Soil testing results

In September 2010, EPA collected soil samples from 40 properties downwind from the Western Minerals Products property to see if there was any residual asbestos contamination from the processing of Libby vermiculite ore. This analysis used methods more sensitive than were available when the investigation began in 2001. No fibers were detected in any of the samples.

Health Consultation

MDH and ATSDR evaluated all test results from the neighborhood near the Western Minerals plant. The health consultation found that levels of Libby asbestos in indoor air in homes, if present, were very low, similar to background. No Libby asbestos was found in indoor dust or exterior soil, and contamination from the plant appears to have been removed from residences and is not a health problem. The investigation has not evaluated the effect of the presence of vermiculite insulation in homes.

On the Web:

For a summary of the health consultation findings, visit:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/hazardous/sites/hennepin/western/index.html.

General site information can be found on the following EPA website:

www.epa.gov/region5/cleanup/westernmineral/index.htm

Homeowners who have vermiculite insulation should follow the guidelines on the EPA website:

www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/insulation.html.



Vermiculite forms that are present in Zonolite insulation material.

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WESTERN MINERAL PRODUCT SUPERFUND SITE: Tests Show No Health Threat from "Libby" Asbestos

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