



Fact Sheet

ATSDR Libby Amphibole Health Risk Initiative

Introduction

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have agreed to an \$8 million health risk initiative to add to the understanding of long-term health effects of exposure to asbestos amphibole in Libby, Montana, and the surrounding community.

What is ATSDR going to do?

ATSDR will conduct several activities aimed at closing gaps in knowledge about the effects of exposure to amphibole asbestos:

- Epidemiological studies of persons exposed to Libby Amphibole will include:
 - Health evaluations of persons originally exposed to Libby Amphibole in childhood,
 - Expanded evaluation of persons exposed in Libby, including those with a lower level of exposure, and
 - Assessing whether there are health effects of exposure that are not related to lung disease, such as auto-immune conditions.
- Enhancement of systems to track health outcomes related to exposure and to link this information with other local databases, such as those maintained by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, EPA or state databases.
- Create computer or mathematical models that will help explain what level of exposure (“dose”) leads to health effects.
- Completion of a Film/ Digital Chest X-ray Comparison Study in which digital chest x-rays will be compared with film to see if digital is more accurate.
- Update the Tremolite Asbestos Registry (TAR) including a review of mortality and cancer incidence.
- Further investigation of worker exposures and health effects in Marysville, OH, because new information about worker exposures there may help in developing reference toxicity values.

How will these projects be carried out?

ATSDR will solicit proposals to conduct the epidemiological studies and other public health activities. These competitive announcements provide the best way of identifying the most qualified group or groups to conduct the studies. ATSDR will require that these applicants work in close collaboration with stakeholders in Libby.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/ATSDR and other federal employees will provide administrative and scientific leadership and guidance on these projects.

How long will this work take?

ATSDR expects this work to take about five years in total.

Who will benefit from this work?

Results from these studies and public health activities will help patients and their health care professionals better manage health outcomes associated with exposure to Libby Amphibole or determine how to avoid future exposures.

These results will also provide the community and environmental health professionals with a better understanding of the health effects of lower-level exposures to Libby Amphibole.

Scientific and public health communities will also benefit from these activities, which will provide information on such topics as the health effects of childhood exposure to Libby Amphibole, health effects in areas other than the lungs (such as autoimmune disease), and disease progression.

Why is ATSDR doing this work now?

While scientists have a good understanding of the toxic effect of asbestos on workers who have direct contact with Libby Amphibole and their families, scientists don't understand fully the effects of lower-level and airborne Libby Amphibole exposure. In addition, the vermiculite mined in Libby was packaged and sent to over 200 sites in the U.S., and the effects of exposure to workers and their families in other areas are not fully understood at this time.

What is different about this set of projects from what has been done in the past?

Some activities are new and some are continuing. These activities will contribute to addressing the gaps in current asbestos knowledge and those associated with amphibole.

This work, led by ATSDR in collaboration with EPA and with input from scientific agency experts, will provide crucial public health information on exposure to lower levels of environmental or ambient Libby Amphibole.

Why did ATSDR decide on this series of projects?

The situation in Libby (type of amphibole, geographic isolation and urgency for EPA/ ATSDR action) made this a critical study site. The results of this initiative should help to reduce scientific uncertainties associated with the health effects of lower level Libby Amphibole exposures

For more information:

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