



Oak Ridge High School El Dorado Hills, California Newsletter

Volume I

July 2004

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a federal public health agency and a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has developed this newsletter for members of the El Dorado Hills, California, community. The purpose of this first newsletter is to provide some basic information about ATSDR and to provide an update on ATSDR's activities at the Oak Ridge High School.



School campus in February 2004

Visit ATSDR's Internet Home Page
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>

What is ATSDR?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the principal public health agency charged with evaluating human health issues related to uncontrolled releases of hazardous substances in the environment. ATSDR was created by the Superfund law of 1980.

ATSDR's mission is to serve the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information to prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances.

How did ATSDR become involved at the Oak Ridge High School?

A concerned community member requested ATSDR to evaluate ways that people in the community could be exposed to naturally occurring asbestos at the Oak Ridge High School. ATSDR accepted the request and began the process of conducting a **public health consultation** to address the issue.

What is a public health consultation?

ATSDR conducts public health consultations to provide a timely response to questions about health risks related to a specific place or to a specific hazardous material. ATSDR staff members collect available environmental and toxicological information, review scientific literature, and gather information from people in the community to find out their health concerns and their knowledge of ways that people in the community could be exposed to hazardous materials in the area.

How does ATSDR conduct a public health consultation?

ATSDR assembles a team to collect available data and information for evaluation. The team may be composed of environmental scientists, physicians, toxicologists, health education specialists, and other staff members. One of the first things the team does is to conduct a "site scoping" visit to see the site firsthand and talk to people in the community to learn what their health concerns are. All available environmental data and health-related information is also collected as part of the site scoping visit. ATSDR completed a site scoping visit to the Oak Ridge High School earlier this year.

ATSDR scientists review the information about the site and all available environmental data to determine how people could be exposed. *For the Oak Ridge High School, they will evaluate how people could be exposed to asbestos and whether that exposure could harm their health.* The results of the evaluation will be reported in a written public health consultation.

A public health consultation typically includes:

- review of relevant information and data,
- analysis of possible exposure pathways (ways in which people could be exposed to a hazardous substance),
- conclusions about public health hazards, and
- recommendations for actions to prevent or reduce exposure.

What does ATSDR do in communities?

- ATSDR works with individuals, communities, environmental groups, tribal governments, and local, state, and other federal agencies to protect the public's health.
- ATSDR involves community members in the process of evaluating issues in a community. We actively seek input from the persons who live and work in the area.
- ATSDR is independent and objective and makes public health decisions on the basis of current available science.
- ATSDR reviews and assesses environmental, health, and community information and data.
- While evaluating public health issues in a community, ATSDR contacts community members, along with the relevant federal, state, and local health and environmental agencies.
- ATSDR provides environmental health education for health care providers and community members.
- When issues do not fall within ATSDR's area of responsibility, they are referred to local, state, or other federal agencies.

What does ATSDR not do in communities?

- ATSDR does not make or enforce regulations. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a regulatory agency, but ATSDR is an advisory public health agency.
- ATSDR does not provide medical treatment or health care services.
- ATSDR does not provide funds to relocate community members or to clean up a site.

What is an exposure pathway?

In order to be exposed to a hazardous substance, there must be a way for a person to come into contact with the substance. The way in which a person is exposed is called an exposure pathway. A person can come into contact with a hazardous substance by:

- ingestion - eating or drinking something containing the substance,
- inhalation - breathing in air that contains a hazardous substance, or
- skin (or dermal) contact - touching something that has a hazardous substance on it or in it.

Hazardous substances do not cause health problems if people do not come into contact with them. However, even if a person is exposed to a hazardous substance, the exposure may not cause health problems. Whether exposure leads to illness depends on many factors, including:

- length of exposure,
- how often exposure occurs,
- the amount of the hazardous substance to which a person is exposed, and
- health status or other factors affecting individual susceptibility.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of six different fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. Asbestos fibers are too small to be seen by the naked eye. They do not dissolve in water or evaporate, and they are resistant to heat, fire, and chemical and biological degradation.

Naturally occurring asbestos refers to these fibrous minerals found in the rocks in an area or released into the surrounding soil as a result of weathering processes. Asbestos is also found in many commercial products, including insulation, brake linings, and roofing shingles. There are two general classes of asbestos, amphibole and chrysotile. These classes differ in mineral structure. The type found at Oak Ridge High School is primarily amphibole asbestos, as shown below.



Why is asbestos a potential concern?

Any activity that causes asbestos-bearing soil or rock to be disturbed can potentially result in the release of asbestos fibers into the air. Asbestos becomes a health concern when fibers are breathed (inhaled) into the lungs.

Everyone in the United States has been exposed to some amount of asbestos from living in an industrialized country.

Many factors determine if someone who is exposed to asbestos will develop an asbestos-related disease. The factors include:

- the amount of asbestos the person was exposed to,
- how often and for how long the person was exposed to asbestos,
- the smoking history of the person, and
- the type and size of the asbestos fibers.

What is ATSDR planning next?

- ATSDR will review the Oak Ridge High School environmental asbestos testing results and make health recommendations in a public health consultation in Fall 2004.
- As data become available from additional sampling in the area, ATSDR may evaluate it and, if appropriate, make additional recommendations.

Who are the members of the ATSDR team?

Jill Dyken, PhD, PE
Environmental Health Scientist
John Wheeler, PhD, DABT
Toxicologist
CDR Susan Muza, RS
Acting Senior Regional Representative
Libby Levy
Regional Representative
Ketna Mistry, MD, FAAP
Medical Officer
Youlanda R. Outin, AOS
Health Communications Specialist
Sarah Stuart Cox, MPH
Health Education Specialist

Would you like to be on the ATSDR mailing list?

Please call Youlanda R. Outin, toll free, at 1-888-422-8737 (please mention the Oak Ridge High School in El Dorado Hills, California) or e-mail atsdr-cib@cdc.gov.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about ATSDR's activities at the site, please contact Jill Dyken, Environmental Health Scientist, or Youlanda R. Outin, Health Communications Specialist, toll free at 1-888-422-8737, or you may call ATSDR's regional office at 415-947-4318.

ATSDR's toll free number is answered Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM, Eastern Standard Time. Please mention that you are calling about the Oak Ridge High School in El Dorado Hills, California. If you call after business hours, please leave a message with a number where you can be reached. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.