



Western Minerals Products Omaha, Nebraska

Health consultation completed

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has completed a health consultation for the former Western Mineral Products site at 3520 I Street in Omaha, Nebraska. The evaluation focused on ways that people could have been or may be exposed to asbestos from vermiculite processed at this site from the 1940s to 1989. Some of the important findings from the evaluation are summarized in the following paragraphs.

What are the conclusions of the health consultation?

We encourage former workers and household members (people who lived with them, including children) to learn more about asbestos and to see a physician with expertise in asbestos-related lung disease. People who worked at the Western Mineral Products plant in Omaha when it processed vermiculite were exposed to asbestos levels that exceeded workplace health standards. Household contacts (people who lived with the former workers) were also exposed to fibers carried home on workers' hair and clothing.

Could I be exposed to asbestos from this site now?

The building was cleaned, and testing showed no detectable asbestos fibers when the Western Mineral Products plant was sold. On the basis of this information, current workers are not being exposed to asbestos. People who live and work around the site are unlikely to be exposed to asbestos from the site.

There are very low levels of asbestos in soil in back of the site, but because people don't go there often, exposure to asbestos fibers there is unlikely.

We found no indication that people brought vermiculite or waste rock home from the site to use in their yards, gardens, or driveways. However, if they did, they may be exposed now to asbestos if they disturb or handle this material.

Could I have been exposed to asbestos from this site in the past?

You were probably exposed to asbestos from this site if you:

- worked at the facility when it processed vermiculite,
- lived with someone who worked at the facility when vermiculite was processed there,
- had direct contact with vermiculite, vermiculite waste rock (also called "stoner rock") or dust/emissions from the facility in the past, or
- brought vermiculite and/or waste rock home to use in your yard, garden, or driveway.

What are the health effects of asbestos exposure?

Exposure to asbestos does not necessarily mean that a person will become ill as a result of the exposure. Breathing in asbestos fibers that can be released from asbestos-contaminated vermiculite may increase a person's likelihood of developing lung cancer, mesothelioma (a cancer of the outer lining of the lungs and/or abdominal cavity), lung abnormalities and breathing disorders. Repeated and prolonged exposure to high levels of asbestos increases the chances of developing these diseases.

What should I do if I have been exposed to asbestos?

People who have been exposed to asbestos can limit their chances of future illness if they try to prevent further exposure to asbestos and they do not smoke. The combination of smoking and asbestos exposure greatly increases the likelihood of more serious health problems, such as lung cancer.

What is vermiculite?

Vermiculite is a naturally occurring mineral (minerals are the 'building blocks' of rocks) composed of shiny flakes that resemble mica. Historically, much of the world's supply of vermiculite came from a mine near Libby, Montana. The Libby mine also had a natural deposit of asbestos, and the vermiculite from Libby contains asbestos.

National Asbestos EXPOSURE REVIEW

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. It is made up of fibers that may be so small that you cannot see them.

What is "asbestos exposure"?

Breathing in asbestos fibers is called asbestos exposure. When asbestos fibers are breathed into your lungs, they may remain there for a lifetime. In some cases, these fibers might damage your lungs or the lining of your lungs and cause illness and even death.

Background information for the site

The former Western Mineral Products site at 3520 I Street in Omaha, Nebraska, operated from the 1940s until 1989. The facility processed vermiculite that came from an asbestos-contaminated mine in Libby, Montana.

The facility exfoliated (expanded, or "popped") vermiculite to manufacture attic insulation and lightweight concrete aggregate. The Omaha plant processed more than 165,000 tons of Libby vermiculite from 1967 to 1991; records are unavailable for the time period before 1967.

The Omaha vermiculite exfoliation facility was closed in 1989. Upon transfer to the current owner, the building was cleaned and tested to show that asbestos fibers were not detected. The former processing buildings are currently occupied by a gutter company and an archery club. The area surrounding the site is used mainly for commercial and industrial purposes.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 collected environmental samples at this site in 2000. The levels of asbestos in soil were below 1%, which is EPA Region 7's action level for removal.

How can the public help?

The public can help ATSDR by:

- Calling the number below and providing information about this vermiculite processing site, including information about the disposal and distribution of waste rock
- Sharing this fact sheet with former workers, their household contacts and past community members who lived near the plant. Ask them to call the number below for more information

Where can I find more information?

The health consultation report may be reviewed in person at the following repository:

South Branch Library, 2303 M Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68108-2828

The health consultation and further information about asbestos are available on the Internet at the following address: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer

For more information, please call ATSDR toll-free at 1-888-422-8737 (1-888-42-ATSDR) and ask to speak with Maria Teran-MacIver or Debra Joseph, Community Involvement Specialists. Please refer to the former Western Mineral Products site in Omaha, Nebraska.