

Asbestos



Neighborhood Health Alert Regarding WR Grace Plant, 2302 N. Harding*, Portland, OR

Overview

Introduction

Oregon State Public Health (OSPH), along with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a federal public health agency, has completed an exposure evaluation on former Vermiculite Northwest (WR Grace Plant) in Portland, Oregon. The evaluation considered ways that people could be exposed to asbestos from this site now or ways that people could have been exposed in the past.

Who should read this

Read this alert if you or someone you know:

- Currently lives near the former WR Grace Portland Plant
 - Worked at the plant between 1967 and 1994
 - Lived in a household in which someone worked at the plant between 1967 and 1994, or
 - Lived near the plant for any period between 1967 and 1994.
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Why this site is being evaluated

ATSDR is evaluating a number of sites throughout the United States where facilities received vermiculite from a mine in Libby, Montana. Vermiculite from Libby was found to contain asbestos. Vermiculite Northwest received Libby vermiculite from 1967 and 1991.

Purpose of alert

This alert explains:

- Who might be at risk for exposure to asbestos from the plant now or at risk from past exposure
 - How people are or were exposed to asbestos
 - What to do if you think you've been exposed to asbestos, and
 - Where you can get more information.
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*Other addresses associated with this site include 2303 N. Harding Ave, 2335 N. Harding, 2336 N. Randolph, 1121 N. Loring St.

Am I at risk for asbestos exposure?

Important!

Being exposed to asbestos does not mean that you will develop health problems! Many things need to be considered when evaluating whether you are at risk for health problems from asbestos exposure. A doctor can help you find out if you have health problems from asbestos exposure.

Former workers are most at risk

Workers may have been exposed to asbestos anywhere in and around the plant. The plant processed vermiculite that contained asbestos. Vermiculite was processed by expanding it in furnaces. Asbestos fibers were released into the air in the plant throughout the workday when vermiculite was processed and handled. Here are some examples of work activities known to have released fibers into the air:

- Unloading vermiculite from rail cars
 - Moving vermiculite to furnaces
 - Processing vermiculite, or
 - Handling waste rock (unexpanded vermiculite) after processing.
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Family members of former workers

Workers who were exposed may have brought asbestos fibers home on their clothes, shoes, and bodies. Therefore, people who lived in their households could have been exposed to asbestos, too. Even handling and washing a worker's clothes could have exposed someone to asbestos.

Former residents

People who lived near the plant may have been exposed to asbestos in the following ways:

- *Playing on waste piles.* Children living nearby might have played on vermiculite waste rock piles left outside the plant. They might have breathed in air containing asbestos fibers while they played there.
- *Moving or handling the waste rock.* People, workers included, may have taken waste rock from the plant to their homes. This waste rock was used in many ways—for example, in gardens, in children's play areas, and for fill or paving material. People who came into direct contact with this waste rock probably breathed in air that contained asbestos fibers.
- *Breathing air within a few blocks of the site.* Sometimes when the plant was operating, dust and asbestos fibers were released into the air. People who lived within a few blocks of the plant between 1967 and 1994 might have breathed in air that contained asbestos fibers.

Current residents

Most current residents living in the neighborhood are not being exposed to asbestos from the site. The plant stopped processing asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in 1991.

In the past, some people may have taken waste rock home from the plant and used it around their homes. Today, people could still be exposed to asbestos around their homes if any waste rock remains uncovered and open to the air. That's because every time this waste rock is stirred up, asbestos fibers may be released into the air.

How can asbestos exposure make you sick?

Asbestos exposure and health

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. It is made up of fibers that are so small that you cannot see them. If asbestos fibers are in the air you breathe, you will get asbestos fibers in your lungs. This is the primary way that people are exposed to asbestos.

Asbestos fibers may remain in the lungs for a lifetime. In some cases, the fibers might damage the lungs or the lining of the lungs, leading to illness and even death.

What should I do if I have been exposed?

Take action

Inform your doctor. Even if you don't feel sick, tell your doctor that you might have been exposed to asbestos. Most people don't show any signs or symptoms of asbestos-related disease for 10 to 20 years or more after exposure. Only a doctor can tell if you have any health problems due to asbestos exposure. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist who treats diseases caused by asbestos.

Show this fact sheet to your doctor. Please take this fact sheet to your doctor because the information in it might be helpful in evaluating your health risk.

Quit smoking. If you are a smoker, quit smoking. Smoking combined with asbestos exposure greatly increases the risk of getting lung cancer.

Get regular influenza (flu) and pneumonia shots. Regular inoculations help reduce the chance of lung infections.

What should I do if I have been exposed?, Continued

Get involved

You can help by:

- Calling the numbers below to report any information about disposal or distribution of waste rock from this site, and
 - Sharing this fact sheet with former workers, their family members, and people who lived near the plant. Please give them the numbers below to call for more information.
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Stay informed

If you or your doctor wants more information about the site investigation or wants to ask specific questions, contact:

Oregon State Public Health:

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Copies of Health Consultation Report are available at:

Multnomah County Public Library, Central branch

801 S.W. 10th Ave.

Portland, Oregon 97205

503-988-5123

or visit www.healthoregon.org/superfund

Web site:

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer. This Web site gives asbestos-related information and explains ATSDR's review of 28 sites around the country that received Libby vermiculite.

Write:

SHINE Program

800 NE Oregon St., #827

Portland, Oregon 97232
