



## Former Zonolite Co./W.R. Grace Exfoliating Plant, Brutus, New York



### Part of an examination of sites receiving asbestos-contaminated vermiculite ore from Libby, Montana

## Background

The former Zonolite Company/W.R. Grace facility located on Dunn Road in Brutus, New York, operated from 1963 until 1989. The facility was known as the “Weedsport facility” because of its close proximity to the Village of Weedsport.

ATSDR and the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) are evaluating the plant because it processed vermiculite mined in Libby, Montana. The vermiculite from Libby contained asbestos. ATSDR has linked exposure to the asbestos in Libby vermiculite with adverse health effects.

The facility exfoliated (“popped” or expanded) vermiculite ore to manufacture insulation, building products, agricultural products, and fireproofing material (under the brand name Monokote). This process released asbestos fibers from the ore into the air, where they could be inhaled. It also produced unpopped, waste vermiculite often known as stoner rock. The facility processed an estimated 148,485 tons of vermiculite from Libby.

Before leaving the site in 1989, W.R. Grace reportedly cleaned the former exfoliating building and had a contractor collect air samples from inside on-site structures. The results showed no asbestos.

After W.R. Grace terminated operations at the site, a cocoa husk mulch company operated in the former vermiculite processing building until 2001. Currently, the site is unoccupied.

Along with a few homes and farms that surround the facility, the area is a mix of agricultural, undeveloped, and residential properties. The closest community is the Village of Weedsport, which lies about a quarter-mile from the site. According to US Census data, 1,267 people lived within one-mile of the site in 1990.

Recent EPA soil sampling showed some asbestos in soil at the facility. A fence around the site, however, makes human exposure to asbestos from

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contaminated soils unlikely. In addition, the site is covered with vegetation. Samples from residential soils near the site contained either very low levels of asbestos or no asbestos.

- NYS DOH, in cooperation with ATSDR, prepared a health consultation on the Weedsport facility. This report discusses the public health implications of exposure to asbestos related to the site and is available for public comment. (See the end of this fact sheet for more information.)

## Conclusions & Recommendations *Conclusions about Workers:*

- Currently, the site remains unoccupied and access is restricted. Therefore, no worker exposures are occurring at this time.
- People who worked at the Zonolite Company/W.R. Grace exfoliation facility were probably exposed to levels of asbestos exceeding the current workplace standard.
- People who lived with former workers were probably also exposed to elevated asbestos levels from fibers carried home on workers’ hair, skin, and clothing.
- People who worked at landfills that received Zonolite Company/W.R. Grace exfoliation waste may have been exposed to asbestos. Data on the extent of these exposures are not available.
- If workers at the former mulch company were exposed, these exposures were probably minor and are not expected to cause any adverse health effects.
- Future disturbances of soil or renovations at the site could cause further asbestos exposures.

## Recommendations:

- Former W.R. Grace workers and their household contacts (people who lived with them) should consult with a physician who has expertise in asbestos-related lung disease.
- Develop plans to limit exposures that may result from land use changes or renovations.

## Conclusions about the Local Community:

- Not enough data are available to determine to what extent people who lived near the plant while it processed vermiculite were exposed to asbestos. However, as part of the Public Health Action Plan, the NYS DOH is reviewing health statistics for people living near Weedsport facility and other sites in New York that handled Libby vermiculite. The review will examine diseases that may be related to exposure to asbestos. When this review is complete, NYS DOH will share any new information with the local communities.

- The plant is closed, so the community is not currently being exposed to asbestos from plant emissions or from on-site asbestos-contaminated materials.
- Some waste materials may have been used off-site for fill, driveway surfacing, soil amendments, or other applications. Two off-site properties that used waste material for fill and soil amendments have been investigated, results are pending.

## Consumer Products

This project did not review products that contain Libby vermiculite, such as vermiculite attic insulation. Information concerning vermiculite attic insulation is available on ATSDR's Web site at [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEWS/vermiculite051603.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/NEWS/vermiculite051603.html) and on EPA's Web site at [www.epa.gov/asbestos/insulation.html](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/insulation.html)

### What Can I Do?

If you are a worker or a household member who may have been exposed to asbestos-containing vermiculite from this site, we encourage you to visit a physician with expertise in asbestos-related lung disease. For help locating physicians in your state with such expertise, visit the "Links" page on the NAER Web site ([www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/links.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/links.html)).

If you can help provide information about the handling of vermiculite and vermiculite waste at the W.R. Grace plant, or where waste from the plant may have been disposed of or used off-site, please contact the EPA, Region 2 ([www.epa.gov/region2/contact\\_region2.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region2/contact_region2.htm)).

### Where Can I Find More Information?

The health consultation for the Weedsport site is available online at the following address: [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/weedsportny](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/weedsportny). The document also may be reviewed in person at the following location:

**Weedsport Free Library**  
2795 E. Brutus Street  
Weedsport, NY 13166  
Telephone: (315) 834-6222

Public input and questions are encouraged. NYS DOH responses to public comments will be provided in the appendix of the final health consultation. Comments on the health consultation must be submitted in writing or by phone by April 19, 2004. Please mail comments to:

**New York State Department of Health, BEEI**  
547 River Street, Room 300  
Troy, NY 12180-2216

The names of those who submit comments will not be printed in a public document. They are, however, subject to release through requests made under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

For additional information, please call the New York State Department of Health toll-free at (800) 458-1158 ext. 27870, or locally at 518-402-7870. Callers should ask to speak with Deanna Ripstein, Public Health Specialist, and refer to the former Zonolite Company/W.R. Grace site in Brutus, New York.