

Mortality in Libby, Montana, 1979 to 1998

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a public health agency in Atlanta, Georgia, recently updated a report on a review of death certificate data from 1979 to 1998 for the Libby, Montana, community. This fact sheet provides highlights of that report.

Background Information

In December 2000, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), in cooperation with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MDPHHS), released an analysis of mortality in Libby, Montana, for the twenty-year period encompassing 1979 to 1998.

This review of death certificate data was performed to develop accurate information about deaths potentially associated with asbestos exposure in Libby.

After releasing the mortality report, death certificate data inadvertently omitted from the analysis was discovered. Therefore, ATSDR and MDPHHS conducted another search for eligible decedents using the Montana Vital Statistics database.

ATSDR reviewed all death certificates for Libby residents who died between 1979 and 1998, and compared the number of deaths from asbestos-related causes to similar deaths across Montana and the United States.

What did ATSDR find?

- The updated report concluded that for the 20-year period examined, mortality in Libby resulting from malignant and nonmalignant respiratory diseases was significantly elevated.
- The report showed that when compared to Montana and U.S. mortality, there was a 20 percent to 40 percent increase in malignant and nonmalignant respiratory deaths in Libby from 1979 to 1998.
- Specifically, asbestosis mortality in Libby was 40 to 80 times higher than expected and lung cancer mortality was 1.2 to 1.3 times higher than expected when compared to Montana and the United States.

- Mesothelioma mortality was elevated but because statistics on this extremely rare cancer are not routinely collected, it was difficult to quantify the increase. Other non-malignant, noninfectious respiratory deaths also were significantly elevated.
- Most of the increase in respiratory mortality noted in the revised report likely can be associated with occupational exposures.
- Asbestosis and mesothelioma mortality were found almost exclusively in former workers. Some of the lung cancer mortality occurred in former employees of the vermiculite facility.

The new report is a health consultation entitled "Mortality in Libby, Montana (1979 – 1998)" and was released Aug. 8, 2002.

Where can I read the report?

Lincoln County Library
406-293-2778
220 W. 6th Street,
Libby, Montana 59923

ATSDR Libby Office
Contact: Dan Strausbaugh at
406-293-2728 or 2729
501 Mineral Avenue,
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ATSDR Web site: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/asbestos_study.html