

River Street Warehouse Fire and Asbestos Response

Questions and Answers

June 2, 2017

What happened?

Debris from a warehouse fire May 14 blew into Northwest and downtown Portland. The debris may have contained asbestos.

Where did this happen?

The fire broke out at an abandoned warehouse in a mixed industrial, residential and commercial area. The site is located at 1300 North River Street in north Portland, Oregon on the east bank of the Willamette River. To view interactive maps, photos, and video of the cleanup response, visit:

<http://arcg.is/2r1F40V>

What did the government do about it?

On May 16, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency mobilized a coordinated response and sent crews to find and remove debris over an 18 day period. They also tested air quality within the area of interest. For latest updates, visit:

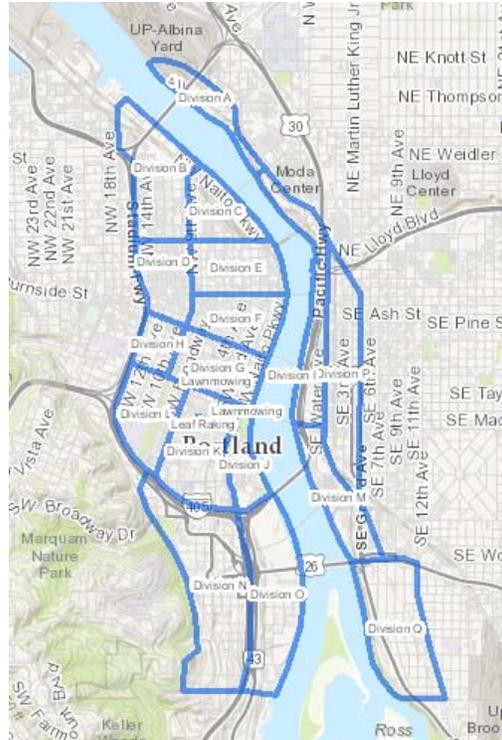
<http://www.oregon.gov/deq/Programs/Pages/River-Street-Fire-Response.aspx>

What did they look for?

From May 16 to June 2, crews removed debris from building roofs, parks, sidewalks and other public spaces. Crews collected over 250 pounds of debris that may have contained asbestos, which looked like white, crumbled or singed paper.

What should I do if I see this material?

Small quantities of wind-blown debris you feel may be associated with the fire can be managed by spraying it with water, putting it in a plastic bag and disposing of it with regular trash. Large quantities of fire debris are unlikely to remain due to the joint DEQ and EPA cleanup efforts.



Subject areas in N, NE, SW and SE Portland for debris search

Can I see the fibers?

No, people can't see asbestos fibers without a microscope because they are so small. Air monitoring was done throughout the response to determine if fibers were in the air. Stationary, personal and activity-based sampling showed 'no detects' of airborne asbestos fibers or levels below the action threshold for the duration of the incident.

What do I do if I see this material in a park or other public area?

DEQ and EPA inspected and cleaned parks and public areas potentially impacted by the warehouse fire. Small, isolated bits of ash that you may find in a large, open area do not pose a health risk.

What about the homeless people who live in the area of interest?

Multnomah County and the City of Portland worked with homeless service providers and outreach workers.



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What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. Asbestos can cause cancer and other kinds of lung disease that may not show up for 10 to 40 years. It can sometimes be found in building materials and other products. Most people have inhaled some asbestos in their lives, but most do not experience health problems. The best way to avoid illness is to avoid asbestos containing materials.

If my roof or patio has not been cleaned, is it safe to use them?

Buildings and areas not in the area of concern or do not have visible fire debris do not need to be cleaned. DEQ and EPA removed fire debris from over 180 roofs and many balconies and patios as part of the cleanup.

Is the risk to be and my family gone?

The River Street Warehouse Fire was responsible for transporting asbestos and ash materials that can contained varying amounts of asbestos. The entire area potentially impacted by fire debris has been surveyed for the presence of suspected asbestos containing materials; all of these materials identified in public areas and roof tops we have accessed have been removed. Air samples collected throughout community areas remain below action thresholds for asbestos. EPA and DEQ have concluded that in areas down-wind from the warehouse, cleanup efforts have resulted in warehouse-related asbestos reduction to levels that will not present unacceptable risk to human health or the environment.

Are there any special precautions I need to take in changing my building's heating, ventilation and air conditioning filters?

No special precautions are needed. As a result of both the warehouse fire, and other human-related sources of asbestos, low levels of asbestos fibers may have been deposited on building HVAC filters. Consequently, as a matter of normal maintenance practices, HVAC filters should be changed-out according to normal maintenance schedules. Those used filters should then be placed in plastic bags and disposed according to normal disposal practices. Care should always be exercised to limit dust generation during maintenance and disposal activities. Sampling for asbestos during those maintenance and disposal activities is not required.

Can I talk to someone about what this might mean for my health?

Call the Oregon Health Authority at 971-673-0442.

For more information please contact:

Matthew Van Sickle, Public Information Officer, DEQ, 971-284-7500.

Alternative formats

Documents can be provided upon request in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request a document in another format or language, call DEQ in Portland at 503-229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696; or email deqinfo@deq.state.or.us.