



Former Vermiculite Northwest Portland, Oregon

Summary Factsheet



Health Consultation Completed

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Superfund Health Investigation and Education (SHINE) Program in cooperation with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has evaluated the potential for health risks associated with asbestos from vermiculite ore that was received from Libby, Montana and processed at the former Vermiculite Northwest facility in Portland, Oregon.

The evaluation focused on ways that people could have been or may be exposed to asbestos from vermiculite processed at this site from 1967 until it closed in 1994. This factsheet outlines some of the important findings from the evaluation.

What are the conclusions of this health consultation?

Former workers and household members (people who lived with them, including children during the time they worked at Vermiculite Northwest) should learn more about asbestos and see a physician trained in asbestos-related lung disease. Workers employed at Vermiculite Northwest during 1967 until 1994 were exposed to elevated levels of Libby asbestos as a result of working in and around the facility. Household contacts of former workers were also likely to have been exposed to Libby asbestos brought home on clothing and hair of workers. Workers employed in businesses in the building after 1993, may have been exposed to asbestos, however, the actual level of exposure to these workers is unknown.

Could I be exposed to asbestos from this site now?

It is unknown whether people who live and work around this site are likely to be exposed to asbestos from the site. Despite prior building cleanup efforts, employees in businesses in the building after the processing plant closed may have been exposed to asbestos. The soil near the railroad tracks east of the facility has not been tested for asbestos, so contact with this soil may result in exposure to asbestos.

There have been reports that some waste rock may have been removed from the site for personal use. Exposure to waste products from the site is possible, although there is no evidence that there were waste piles from vermiculite processing.

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 this facility when it processed vermiculite, or
- Lived with someone who worked at the facility when vermiculite was processed there, or
- Came in contact with waste rock from the site.



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 is the history of the site?

From 1967 until 1994, the former Vermiculite Northwest facility processed vermiculite at their facility at 2302 N. Harding Street in Portland. Some of the vermiculite was from Libby, Montana, and was found to contain asbestos.

The facility exfoliated (expanded or

"popped") vermiculite to manufacture attic insulation. The Vermiculite Northwest plant processed more than 193,113 tons of Libby vermiculite.

The area around the former Vermiculite Northwest facility is zoned industrial. The nearest residences are apartments located a quarter mile to the northeast and the nearest neighborhoods are three-quarters of a mile away.

EPA identified the site for further investigation after sampling found asbestos contamination in the facility. Cleanup of the contaminated building was completed in 2001. EPA has recently revisited the building for further limited sampling at the request of SHINE.

Where can I get more information?

The health consultation report is available at www.healthoregon.org/superfund. For more information, call Amanda Guay at 503-872-5357.

What is vermiculite?

Vermiculite is a naturally occurring mineral compound. It is composed of shiny stone flakes and looks like mica. In the past, much of the world's supply of vermiculite came from a mine near Libby, Montana. After years of mining, the Libby mine was found to have a natural deposit of asbestos, and the vermiculite from Libby contains asbestos.

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 linings of your lungs and cause illness or even death.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name of several fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. Asbestos is composed of separable, long, and thin "needlelike" fibers. The asbestos fibers in vermiculite are too small to be seen by the naked eye.