



FACT SHEET

Asbestos and the Northwest Neighborhood at Lowry

May 2003

BACKGROUND

Asbestos-containing materials have been discovered in several locations in the northwest neighborhood. The northwest neighborhood is defined as those areas west of Uinta Way, north of 8th Avenue, east of Quebec and south of 11th Avenue.

The asbestos-containing materials appear to be related to a complex of Air Force buildings that were demolished between 1959 and 1979. Asbestos-containing debris includes old, discarded water pipes, steam pipes and insulation material.

ASBESTOS EXPOSURE CONCERNS AT LOWRY

Asbestos-containing materials has been found in locations where construction is taking place, in areas where homes have been completed and residents reside, and in open blocks where little or no construction has taken place. These materials have been found both on the surface of the ground and in the subsurface.

Asbestos-containing materials found on the surface of the ground present a potential health risk to people working and living in the northwest neighborhood. If disturbed, microscopic fibers can become airborne. Asbestos fibers suspended in air are of most concern since they can be inhaled. If undisturbed, asbestos does not pose a threat to human health.

Asbestos-containing materials on the surface of the ground also present a health risk if ingested.

HEALTH EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH ASBESTOS EXPOSURE

Asbestos is known to cause several human diseases. Scientists have not been able to determine the amount of asbestos exposure needed to cause disease, but it is believed that the risk of disease is related to the extent of exposure. In other words, the greater the exposure and the longer it lasts, the more likely a person is to contract an asbestos-related disease.

There are many factors that determine the potential effects of asbestos exposure. The most important of these factors are dose (how much), duration (how long), individual susceptibility (e.g. age, lifestyle and state of health) and the time elapsed since the initial exposure. Either heavy exposure for a short time or a lower level exposure over a longer period of time may result in asbestos-related disease. The goal is, therefore, to minimize one's exposure to asbestos.

There are three main diseases related to asbestos exposure. *Asbestosis* is a fibrotic scarring of the lungs, which prevents oxygen from passing through the lung tissue. A second is *mesothelioma*, a cancer of the lining of the chest or abdomen. The third is non-specific lung cancer. The risk of asbestos related lung cancer is greatly increased by smoking.

Typically, asbestos related diseases have a long latency period. The latency period is the time between the onset of the disease and when it is actually detected. With exposure to asbestos, symptoms may not appear for 15 to 40 years after exposure, or even longer.

What Is Asbestos?

- A group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals widely used in a variety of building materials prior to the 1980s.
- Uses included floor and ceiling tiles, texturing materials and thermal insulation.
- Still used in brakes, asphaltic roof coatings and gaskets.

There is no medical test to diagnose an acute exposure to low levels of asbestos, or its potential health effects.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY FAMILY?

There are practical things you can do to minimize the risk of exposure to asbestos if you live in the northwest neighborhood. Managing your activities and the movement of outdoor air into your home will help protect your family.

- Stay off areas of bare soil if possible. When entering and exiting your home, stay on pavement or ground covering such as grass, rock, wood chips or mulch. Keep children and pets off of bare soil.
- If you need to access uncovered areas of soil, be careful not to disturb the soil. If you must access such areas regularly, cover them with plywood, plastic, or hay; or wet them down slightly to prevent any fibers from being kicked up into the air.
- Inside your home, control the movement of outdoor air into your home. On calm days or when the soil is moist from recent precipitation, you can leave your windows open.
- On days of excessive wind or soil disturbance, close your windows. If you notice activities that are disturbing soil and creating dust, please call the Lowry Development Authority (LRA) at (303) 326-7103 and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at (303) 692-3153.
- Do not allow your children or pets to ingest any pieces of debris or soil.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has made cleanup of this site a priority. The Department is working with the LRA, the U.S. Air Force, and the builders and developers in the northwest neighborhood to expeditiously define the extent of the asbestos contamination, and to address quickly any necessary cleanup.

Compliance advisories have been issued by the state to the LRA, the Air Force, and the builders and developers in the northwest neighborhood. These enforcement actions direct the recipients to undertake a number of actions and provide timetables for their completion. The first advisory prohibits excavation, grading and other intrusive activities. It addresses asbestos emission control and sampling plans for areas where construction is ongoing, where homes already exist and where lots have already been landscaped or covered. The advisory directs the recipients to prepare site characterization reports describing the extent of contamination, and response plans detailing how contamination will be cleaned up. The second advisory spells out the need for indoor testing for asbestos in homes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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