

## **EPA Releases Draft Estimates of Asbestos Toxicity in Libby and Troy Montana**

*New information is key step in helping finalize cleanup plans that protect the health of the community*

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(Denver, Colorado – May 3, 2011) At a public meeting at the Libby Memorial Center this evening, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency presented new draft toxicity estimates on the specific type of asbestos in Libby and Troy, Montana. These toxicity estimates, when final, will help secure the best path forward for asbestos cleanup and protection of public health at the Libby Superfund site. The Agency is releasing this draft information earlier than usual in the scientific evaluation process to be more transparent and to more fully engage the community in the review process. The data are preliminary and could change until this review process is complete, which will include review by independent scientists.

Through this action today, EPA is delivering on a promise made to the community to develop a scientific analysis of Libby Amphibole asbestos. Based on requests from the community, the final toxicity estimates for Libby Amphibole asbestos will be used to develop EPA's final risk assessment and cleanup decisions. EPA will use these toxicity estimates to evaluate risks to adults, teens and children who may be exposed to Libby Amphibole during activities such as housework, playing in the yard or at school, walking, bicycling or working in an office or outside.

Although EPA has made significant progress in helping to remove the threat of asbestos in the land and air, and with it, the increased risks of lung cancer and other respiratory problems, actual and potential releases of amphibole asbestos remain a concern in Libby. EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson in 2009 declared a public health emergency in Libby, a first-of-its-kind action that recognized serious impacts to public health.

“For more than a decade, EPA has worked in this community to clean up the pollution left behind by 40 plus years of mining operations. Under this administration, EPA has stepped up its commitment to provide the best science to finish the job of protecting the health and future of the people of Libby,” said Jim Martin, EPA's Regional Administrator in Denver. “Once we finalize these toxicity estimates, they will help guide remaining cleanup actions and identify exposure prevention practices to keep people safe.”

“We decided to provide residents with this draft toxicity estimates as early as possible to ensure that the community is fully informed and engaged. This is a major step forward in establishing the science to improve the cleanup of asbestos in Libby and the protection of the families that live here,” said Paul Anastas, EPA Assistant Administrator for Research and Development.

The draft toxicity estimates released today confirm EPA's earlier assessments of the effectiveness of cleanup actions in reducing exposures in Libby. Specifically, current ambient air concentrations of Libby Amphibole do not appear to result in levels of risk above EPA Superfund targets—which are set to achieve a cleanup level that results in less than a 1 in 10,000 risk of developing lung cancer or a hazard index less than 1 for adverse non-cancer health impacts such as shortness of breath and chest pain.

However, the draft toxicity estimates also indicate that some indoor and outdoor activities that increase the release of asbestos into the air may result in levels of risk that exceed EPA targets. These draft findings, while not final, underscore the need for additional cleanup actions and continued adherence to EPA recommendations that prevent soils from being disturbed, such as watering yards before mowing or digging. Further assessment of exposure, peer review and dialogue with the community will provide additional perspective regarding remaining risks and the best strategy for reducing them.

Today's announcement is the latest step in EPA's continuing efforts to protect human health by reducing exposure to a unique form of asbestos called Libby Amphibole asbestos. Since 1999, EPA has worked to reduce risk by focusing on removing the largest sources of exposure. To date, the agency has spent more than \$330 million and has safely removed more than 825,000 cubic yards of asbestos-contaminated soil from source areas at 1,463 commercial and residential properties. EPA plans to perform approximately 150 residential cleanups this summer.

EPA has focused on reducing the largest sources of contamination, including residences, schools, roads, processing and disposal areas, and parks and ball fields. These efforts have achieved significant reductions in air concentrations of asbestos fibers in Libby. Those levels are 10,000 times lower since the company left the community.

The Libby Asbestos site includes portions of the towns of Libby and Troy and an inactive vermiculite mine seven miles northeast of the town of Libby. Vermiculite had been mined at the Libby site since the 1920s. In 1963, W.R. Grace bought the Zonolite mining operations. The vermiculite from the Libby mine was contaminated with asbestos, a human carcinogen that causes mesothelioma and lung cancer. The mine closed in 1990. EPA started cleanup activities in 2000 and in 2002 the area was listed as a Superfund site.

While no precise statistics exist, vermiculite insulation produced from Libby vermiculite was widely distributed throughout the U.S. and it could potentially be present in millions of homes. EPA recommends that the insulation be left in place undisturbed. If the vermiculite insulation is undisturbed in attics and walls, it is not likely to present a risk to people in the home. EPA does not believe that cleanup action on vermiculite insulation is needed outside of Libby or Troy at this time. Once adopted, the toxicity estimates will apply to other locations in the country where Libby Amphibole asbestos exposures may be of concern.

EPA is working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is providing asbestos-related medical care to area residents.

For more information on the draft toxicity data released today, and on EPA's cleanup activities in Libby and Troy, visit <http://www.epa.gov/libby>.