

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a public health agency in Atlanta, Georgia, recently prepared 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.

Why was this review conducted?

- To compare death rates for residents of the Libby area with those in Montana and in the United States for selected diseases associated with exposure to asbestos
- To review death certificates to determine underlying causes of death for residents of the Libby area

What did the review find for the 20-year period examined?

- Mortality from asbestosis was approximately 40 to 60 times higher than expected
- Mortality from mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer, also appeared to be elevated
- Mortality from other causes, including lung cancer and digestive cancer, was lower than expected

What does ATSDR recommend?

- Further study is needed to understand how people in Libby may have been exposed to asbestos; for example, how asbestos may have traveled through the air and to what extent it reached people.
- Confirm asbestosis cases through a review of medical records (referred to as case series review)
- Link death certificate data with the case series being developed by ATSDR to better characterize exposure pathways
- Conduct similar studies of workers and communities located close to exfoliation facilities that received contaminated vermiculite ore from the Libby mine
- Develop and maintain a surveillance system for mesothelioma

What does this information mean to me?

- Although the mortality review indicates excessive deaths in Libby potentially related to asbestos exposure, not everyone who was exposed to asbestos will develop an asbestos-related illness. Individual risk can only be determined through a medical examination.

- If you participated in the asbestos testing program, and your test results recommend that you follow up with a physician, we urge you to do so.
- Whether you participated in the asbestos medical testing or not, if you experience shortness of breath, a tight feeling in your chest, chest pain, or other change in your lung function or breathing patterns, see your physician immediately.
- Treatments are available to improve quality of life and extend life for people who are diagnosed with an asbestos-related illnesses.

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

2729501 Mineral Avenue, Libby, Montana 59923

Lincoln County Health Department

Contact: Ron Anderson at

406-293-7781, extension 228

418 Mineral Avenue, Libby, Montana 59923

For more information, contact

Steve Dearwent, health consultation author,
404-639-0669;

Dan Strausbaugh, ATSDR Montana representative,
406-293-2728 or 2729;

Dan Holcomb, ATSDR community involvement specialist,
404-639-6064.

ATSDR's toll free number is
1-888-42 ATSDR (1-888-422-8737)

ATSDR's web page is available at
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>