

# Asbestos



## Neighborhood Health Alert

**Regarding the former Zonolite/W. R. Grace Facility--St. Louis  
1705 Sulphur Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri**

### Overview

#### Introduction

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services in cooperation with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a federal public health agency, completed an exposure evaluation on the former Zonolite/W.R. Grace facility in St. Louis, Missouri. The evaluation considered ways that people, particularly past workers, could have been exposed to asbestos-contaminated vermiculite and waste rock.

#### Who should read this

Read this alert if you or someone you know:

- Worked at the plant between the late 1940s and 1988,
- Lived in a household in which someone worked at the plant between the late 1940s and 1988,
- Lived near the plant for any period between the late 1940s and 1988, or
- Currently lives near the former Zonolite/W.R. Grace facility located at 1705 Sulphur Avenue in the city of St. Louis, Missouri.

#### Why this site is being evaluated

ATSDR is evaluating a number of sites throughout the United States where facilities received vermiculite from a mine in Libby, Montana. Vermiculite from Libby was found to contain asbestos. The former Zonolite/W.R. Grace facility in St. Louis received Libby vermiculite between the late 1940s and 1988.

#### Purpose of alert

This alert explains:

- Who might be at risk for exposure to asbestos in the past and present,
- How people were or are exposed to asbestos,
- What to do if you think you've been exposed to asbestos, and
- Where you can get more information.

# Am I at risk for asbestos exposure?

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## Important!

***Being exposed to asbestos does not mean that you will develop health problems!***

Many things need to be considered when evaluating whether you are at risk for health problems from asbestos exposure. A doctor can help you find out if you have health problems from asbestos exposure.

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## Former workers are most at risk

Workers may have been exposed to asbestos anywhere in and around the plant. The plant processed vermiculite that contained asbestos. Vermiculite was processed by expanding it in furnaces. Asbestos fibers were released into the air in the plant throughout the workday when vermiculite was processed and handled. Here are some examples of work activities known to have released fibers into the air:

- Unloading vermiculite from rail cars,
  - Moving vermiculite to furnaces,
  - Processing vermiculite, or
  - Handling waste rock (unexpanded vermiculite) after processing.
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## Family members of former workers

Workers who were exposed may have brought asbestos fibers home on their clothes, shoes, and bodies. Therefore, people who lived in their households could have been exposed to asbestos, too. Even handling and washing a worker's clothes could have exposed someone to asbestos.

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## Former residents

People who lived near the plant may have been exposed to asbestos in the following ways:

- ***Playing on waste piles.*** Children living nearby might have played on vermiculite waste rock piles left outside the plant. They might have breathed in air containing asbestos fibers while they played there.
- ***Moving or handling the waste rock.*** People, workers included, may have taken waste rock from the plant to their homes. This waste rock was used in many ways—for example, in gardens, in children's play areas, and for fill or paving material. People who came into direct contact with this waste rock probably breathed in air that contained asbestos fibers.

***Breathing air within a few blocks of the site.*** Sometimes when the plant was operating, dust and asbestos fibers were released into the air. People who lived within a few blocks of the plant between the late 1940s and 1988 might have breathed in air that contained asbestos fibers.

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## Current residents

Most current residents living in the neighborhood are NOT being exposed to asbestos from the site. The plant stopped processing asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in 1988.

In the past, some people may have taken waste rock home from the plant and used it around their homes. Today, people could still be exposed to asbestos around their homes if any waste rock remains uncovered and open to the air. That's because every time this waste rock is stirred up, asbestos fibers may be released into the air.

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## How can asbestos exposure make you sick?

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### Asbestos exposure and health

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. It can break down to fibers that are so small that you cannot see them. If asbestos fibers are in the air you breathe, you will get asbestos fibers in your lungs. This is the primary way that people are exposed to asbestos.

Asbestos fibers may remain in the lungs for a lifetime. In some cases, the fibers might damage the lungs or the lining of the lungs, leading to illness and even death.

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## What should I do if I have been exposed?

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### Take action

**Inform your doctor.** Even if you don't feel sick, tell your doctor that you might have been exposed to asbestos. Most people don't show any signs or symptoms of asbestos-related disease for 10 to 20 years or more after exposure. Only a doctor can tell if you have any health problems due to asbestos exposure. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist who treats diseases caused by asbestos.

**Show this fact sheet to your doctor.** Please take this fact sheet to your doctor because the information in it might be helpful in evaluating your health risk.

**Quit smoking.** If you are a smoker, quit smoking. Smoking combined with asbestos exposure greatly increases the risk of getting lung cancer.

**Get regular influenza (flu) and pneumonia shots.** Regular inoculations help reduce the chance of lung infections.

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## Get involved

You can help by:

- Calling the numbers below to report any information about disposal or distribution of waste rock from this site, and
  - Sharing this fact sheet with former workers, their family members, and people who lived near the plant. Please give them the numbers below to call for more information.
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## Stay informed

If you or your doctor wants more information about the site investigation or wants to ask specific questions, contact Gale Carlson or Arthur Busch at the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, toll-free (866) 628-9891 or (573) 751-6102, or by email at [arthur.busch@dhss.mo.gov](mailto:arthur.busch@dhss.mo.gov).

*Health Consultation Report and Fact Sheets on the Former Zonolite/W.R. Grace Facility—St. Louis can be found at:*  
[www.dhss.mo.gov/EnvirConsult](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/EnvirConsult)

*Web site:*

[www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer). This Web site gives asbestos-related information and explains ATSDR's review of 28 sites around the country that received Libby vermiculite. If you have questions, contact Maria Teran-Maciver at 1-888-42ATSDR or by email at [Mteran-Maciver@cdc.gov](mailto:Mteran-Maciver@cdc.gov).

Or at local libraries:

St. Louis Public Library—Buder Branch (314) 352-2900  
4401 Hampton Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63109

St. Louis Public Library---Marketplace Branch (314) 647-0939  
6548 Manchester Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63139

*Write:*

Gale Carlson  
Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology  
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services  
PO Box 570  
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102

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