



W.R. Grace Dearborn Plant Dearborn, Michigan



Health consultation completed

The Michigan Department of Community Health, in cooperation with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, has completed a public health consultation for the former W.R. Grace/Zonolite Company site at 14300 Henn Street in Dearborn, Michigan. The consultation focused on ways that people may be exposed to asbestos from vermiculite that was processed at this site from the 1950s to 1989. This fact sheet provides a summary of some important findings from the consultation.

What are the results of the health consultation?

The health consultation concluded that

- People who worked at the Dearborn facility when it processed vermiculite were likely exposed to asbestos at levels that exceeded workplace health standards.
- People who lived in the same household as workers (household contacts) were also likely exposed to asbestos from fibers that were brought into the house on workers' hair, clothing, and shoes.

We encourage former workers and household contacts to learn more about asbestos and to see a physician with expertise in asbestos-related lung disease.

How could I be exposed to asbestos from this site now?

Most people who work or live near the site today are *not* being exposed to asbestos from the site. Under certain unique circumstances, however, some people may be exposed to asbestos from the site.

People who have brought vermiculite or waste rock (also called "stoner rock") home from the site to use in their yard, garden, or driveway may be exposed to asbestos if they disturb or handle the material. Asbestos fibers can remain unchanged for long periods of time because the fibers do not evaporate into air, dissolve in water, or move through soil.

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. We now know that vermiculite from the Libby mine also contained asbestos.

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.

What is "asbestos exposure"?

Asbestos exposure occurs when people breathe tiny asbestos fibers into their lungs, where the fibers can later cause health effects. If vermiculite, soil, or dust that contain asbestos is disturbed, thin, lightweight asbestos fibers are released into the air. People who breathe the air may breathe in asbestos fibers.

Workers at the site now and people who live next to the site may have occasional contact with soil that contains low levels of asbestos. They may also be exposed to indoor dust that contains low levels of asbestos. Such infrequent, low-level exposures are not expected to increase the risk of health effects.

Could I have been exposed to asbestos from this site in the past?

You were exposed to asbestos from this site if you

- worked at the facility when it processed vermiculite or
- lived in a household with someone who worked at the facility when vermiculite was processed there.

You probably were exposed to asbestos from this site if

- you lived near the site and had direct contact with vermiculite, waste rock, contaminated soil, or dust emissions from the facility in the past, or

- you played in waste rock piles at the site, or
- you brought vermiculite or waste rock home to use in your yard, garden, or driveway.

What are the health effects of asbestos exposure?

You will not necessarily become ill because you have been exposed to asbestos. However, breathing in the tiny asbestos fibers that can be released from vermiculite contaminated with asbestos may increase the 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 chance of developing these health effects.

What should I do if I have been exposed to asbestos?

If you have been exposed to asbestos, you can limit your chances of future illness if you do not smoke and you try to prevent further exposure to asbestos. The combination of smoking and asbestos exposure greatly increases the likelihood of more serious health problems, such as lung cancer.

Where can I find more information?

You may read the health consultation report at the

Dearborn Public Library:

16301 Michigan Avenue
Dearborn, Michigan 48126
(telephone: 313-943-2330) Or at the

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)

Community Health & Research Center:

6450 Maple Street, Dearborn, Michigan 48126
(telephone: 313-216-2200)

The health consultation is also available on the Internet at the following addresses:

- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/dearbornmi
- www.michigan.gov/mdch-toxics

You may also call the Michigan Department of Community Health at their toll-free number, 800- 648-6942, and speak to Toxicologist Erik Janus. Please mention that you are calling about the W.R. Grace site in Dearborn, Michigan.

History of the site

From the early 1950s until 1989, the W.R. Grace/Zonolite Company operated a vermiculite processing facility at 14300 Henn Street in Dearborn. The facility processed vermiculite from Libby, Montana, that was found to contain asbestos.

The facility exfoliated (expanded or "popped") vermiculite to manufacture attic insulation (sold as 'Zonolite') and lightweight concrete aggregate. Zonolite attic insulation may be present in homes throughout the area. The Dearborn plant processed more than 200,000 tons of Libby vermiculite from 1966 to 1988; records are unavailable for the time period before 1966.

The Dearborn vermiculite exfoliation facility was closed in 1989. The site is now owned and operated by Die, Mold & Automation Components, Incorporated. This company expanded their operations onto the 14300 Henn Street property in 1992. Before this, the company owned the property west of the vermiculite facility. The land surrounding the facility is used for recreational, residential, educational, commercial, and industrial purposes.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency collected environmental samples at the site and found asbestos in soil at the site. Asbestos was also found in samples of vermiculite waste material found inside the building, and that material has been removed from the building.