

Report -- Avoid naturally occurring asbestos

Raheem Hosseini, Folsom Telegraph, 4-8-10

A consultation by a federal public health agency concluded long-term exposure to naturally occurring asbestos in El Dorado Hills is potentially harmful, but stopped short of recommending a more in-depth study.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry released its health consultation last week, beginning a three-month public comment period. The 123-page report includes little new information about what has become the community's most pressing public health concern, advising increased awareness and continued county and state monitoring.

"As we monitor the situation and learn from current asbestos research projects, we may update our recommendations," said Jill Dyken, PhD, an ATSDR environmental health scientist.

The federal agency conducted the consultation in response to concerns about potential exposure to naturally occurring asbestos deposits in local soil and rock formations. Sampling conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2004 had shown that people performing typical outdoor recreational activities could breathe in high levels of asbestos. Community members asked ATSDR what this finding meant to their health and what they should do to protect their health.

The agency concluded that the predicted risks are high enough to warrant preventive measures.

"It's difficult to predict the risk of disease from asbestos exposure," Dyken said. "We compared several different risk methods and examined additional asbestos findings from El Dorado Hills. Although we found an increased risk of disease, the asbestos levels here don't appear to be so high that we would be able to measure increased disease rates in the community."

That's because asbestos-related conditions typically take decades to develop, according to the report. It's only been in the last 15 years, the report says, that the area has seen large increases in growth and development, trends that have disturbed asbestos deposits.

The agency says background levels of natural occurring asbestos are higher in El Dorado Hills than in other non-urban and most urban environments, but "much lower" than those measured and estimated in historical asbestos worker studies and lower than what limited exposure studies have suggested are present in other communities where naturally occurring asbestos and disease were linked.

Given that, the findings did indicate that activities resulted in significantly greater asbestos exposures than measured at activity-free reference stations and recommended residents do what they can to limit their exposure or avoid areas where naturally occurring asbestos is present.

Written public comments on the report are due June 30 and can be sent to ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov or Rolanda Morrison, ?Re: El Dorado Hills?ATSDR Records Center, ?4770 Buford Highway, NE (MS F-09)?Atlanta, GA 30341. The full report can be read at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/pha/publiccomments.asp>.