



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

At the request of both Montana Senators, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated this review of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) efforts to clean up amphibole asbestos contamination in Libby, Montana. We are issuing this quick action report to bring EPA management's immediate attention to significant, time-critical issues we identified during our limited review.

Background

After 1999 media reports called attention to Libby citizens' health problems, EPA officials requested that we review EPA's actions. Also in 1999, EPA began a cleanup of Libby asbestos contamination. In January 2000, due to citizen concerns, EPA started sampling and analyzing lawn and garden products that contained vermiculite. In March 2001, we reported that EPA had addressed asbestos contamination at other sites, but failed to institute regulations or other controls that might have protected Libby's citizens from the health effects of asbestos contamination. In 2002, EPA began an emergency response cleanup of Libby residential and commercial properties.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20061205-2007-P-00002.pdf

EPA Needs to Plan and Complete A Toxicity Assessment For the Libby Asbestos Cleanup

In our limited review, we identified the following significant issues that we believe are critical to a successful cleanup in Libby, Montana.

- EPA has not completed a toxicity assessment of amphibole asbestos necessary to determine the safe level for human exposure; therefore, EPA cannot be sure that the Libby cleanup sufficiently reduces the risk that humans may become ill or, if ill already, get worse.
- EPA's public information documents *Living with Vermiculite* and *Asbestos in Your Home* are inconsistent about safety concerns.

We recommend EPA:

- Fund and execute a comprehensive amphibole asbestos toxicity assessment to determine (1) the effectiveness of the Libby removal actions, and (2) whether more actions are necessary. The toxicity assessment should include the effects of asbestos exposure on children. The EPA Science Advisory Board¹ should review the toxicity assessment and report to the Office of the Administrator and the Libby Community Advisory Group whether the proposed toxicity assessment can sufficiently protect human health.
- Review and correct any statements that cannot be supported in any documentation mailed or made available to Libby residents regarding the safety of living with or handling asbestos until EPA confirms those facts through a toxicity assessment.

¹ Congress established the EPA Science Advisory Board in 1978, in part, to review the guidelines governing the use of scientific and technical information in regulatory decisions.