



## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
July 28, 2011

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### **Health Officials Are Urging Homeowners and Volunteers To Take Precautions After Asbestos-Containing Insulation Has Been Found in Minot and Ward County**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health, First District Health Unit and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are warning homeowners and volunteers cleaning out flood-damaged homes that insulation containing asbestos has been found in Minot.

Homeowners in the Minot and Ward County area are being urged to take the time to identify insulation that may contain asbestos (called vermiculite insulation) and take precautions to protect themselves and volunteers working in the home and to ensure that it is disposed of properly. Vermiculite insulation recently has been found along the curbs in the Minot area. Homeowners and volunteers should be aware that houses built or renovated between the years of 1940 to 1986 may contain vermiculite insulation. Precautions should be taken to prevent potential exposure during clean-up activities.

Vermiculite or “Zonolite” attic insulation was sold to millions of homeowners across the nation, including North Dakota, and often contains asbestos. Vermiculite is a naturally-occurring mineral and the insulation is easy to identify. It’s pebbly and loose and resembles very lightweight gravel or small packing peanuts. It looks like shiny, small pieces of popcorn and is usually light-brown or gold in color. Most other types of insulation are fibrous or woolly. Vermiculite insulation may be poured inside framed walls or cinder (concrete) block walls, as well as spread out between attic rafters or under floors. Pictures of vermiculite insulation can be found on the EPA’s website at: <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/verm.html>.

Inhalation of asbestos can result in lung diseases such as asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer. Having asbestos-containing material in a house is not a health concern unless the tiny fibers become airborne and are inhaled.

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EPA recommends that asbestos cleanup or abatement activities be performed by state-accredited asbestos contractors. The North Dakota Department of Health can provide the names of accredited asbestos inspectors and asbestos abatement contractors for homeowners who wish to have asbestos removed from their home or visit the Department's website at: <http://www.ndhealth.gov/AQ/IAQ/ASB/Contractors.pdf>.

If a homeowner or volunteer needs to handle the vermiculite insulation during cleanup, the following guidance should be used to help protect the workers and others in the house.

- When handling materials that may be contaminated with asbestos, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that, **at a minimum**, you wear gloves, goggles, and most importantly a HEPA respirator (not just a dust mask).
- The asbestos-containing material that needs to be removed should be handled while wet or damp, double bagged and properly labeled as "asbestos containing." The bags can be placed at the curb with the household hazardous waste debris.
- Tape off rooms with plastic sheeting to prevent contaminating other areas of the home. Keep the insulation damp to prevent spreading dust.
- Keep windows open for good ventilation and wipe up all dust and debris using wet cleaning methods (wet-wiping and wet-mopping).
- A HEPA vacuum can be used for clean-up of minor dust or debris. Do not use a home/shop vacuum.
- While still wearing a respirator/mask, wash hands and clothing after handling such materials.
- If at all possible, avoid activities that will generate dust, such as dry sweeping or vacuuming debris that may contain asbestos.
- Temporarily move your family (especially children and pregnant women) out of the house until the work is done and the area is properly cleaned. If you can't move your family, completely seal off the work area where the asbestos work is occurring.
- If renovations involve more extensive removal or exposure to asbestos containing insulation, it's best to hire a state-licensed asbestos removal contractor.

For more information, contact Sandi Washek or Jane Kangas, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5188 or 701.476.4122.

*Please note: For those needing information in other languages, an interpreter can be arranged by calling the number listed on the news release.*

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