

December 16, 2011

We just won a huge victory in our eight-year battle to stop the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency from implementing and authorizing a horrifically dangerous "wet method" of removing asbestos from buildings.

Yesterday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's internal watchdog, the Inspector General, issued a report that confirms what we have been arguing for years -- that the agency should stop its unapproved version of the so-called "wet method" of asbestos removal. This call for action refutes the shoddy science and bureaucratic dysfunction that has protected the dangerous method for years.

Our Environmental Enforcement Project (EEP) has been exposing and blocking the EPA's efforts to utilize this method since 2004, first in Fort Worth and then in St. Louis. Along with environmental groups and labor unions, the EEP has also been urging the EPA to shut down its unapproved asbestos-removal experiments because they are illegal and dangerous.

Now, the EPA's Inspector General agrees.

The report -- titled, "Use of Unapproved Asbestos Demolition Methods May Threaten Public Health" -- notes that the EPA conducted tests of the wet method and each time got releases of asbestos, potentially exposing on-site workers and nearby residents to the deadly carcinogen. That method involves hosing down the debris during demolition of a building, ostensibly to contain the asbestos. (The approved method requires that trained specialists in protective gear remove all of the asbestos before demolition.)



When the EPA refused to stop its wet-method experiments, we, along with the Natural Resources Defense Council, filed a Freedom of Information Act request to get the underlying data about these experiments. The EPA did not release most of the documents, numbering over 26,000 pages, until we forced disclosure by suing in federal court.

Several of the documents show that one of the EPA's own senior scientists found that tests of the Alternative Asbestos Control Method (AACM) -- the unapproved wet method -- did not comply with health and safety standards and may have endangered demolition workers and agency employees.

A detailed summary of the history of the AACM -- as well as the IG's report and a number of the EPA's now-disclosed documents -- can be found [here](#).

The Department of Energy recently used the unapproved wet method at its Hanford, Wash., site, and is planning to use it again in Paducah, Ky., but **yesterday's IG report states clearly -- as we have been arguing for years -- that government agencies should immediately stop any further use of this method.**

The Center for Public Integrity's iWatch News [broke this story](#) yesterday afternoon. It has since been [picked up by the Huffington Post](#) and other outlets.

Congratulations to EEP Director Jim Hecker and the NRDC for making this happen.

It also couldn't have happened without your support. Many heartfelt thanks from all of us at Public Justice. And happy holidays!

Arthur Bryant
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Public Justice Foundation