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EPA Shuts Down Dangerous Asbestos Removal Method

In an “Early Warning Report” released today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Inspector General says the agency should ban its unapproved version of a “wet method” of asbestos removal -- a call for action that refutes the “shoddy science and bureaucratic dysfunction” that has protected the dangerous method for years, said Public Justice Environmental Enforcement Project Director Jim Hecker.

The report, “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.

Public Justice, environmental groups and labor unions have long urged the EPA to shut down its asbestos-removal experiments. When the agency refused, Public Justice and the Natural Resources Defense Council filed a Freedom of Information Act request to get the underlying data about these experiments. EPA did not release most of the documents, numbering over 26,000 pages, until after the groups sued in federal court to force disclosure.

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 can be found [here](#).)

The Department of Energy recently used the unapproved method at its Hanford, Wash., site, and is planning to use it again in Paducah, Ky., but today’s Inspector General report states clearly that government agencies should immediately stop any further use of this method.

“We hope this new report will finally put the nail in the coffin of this unapproved and dangerous method of asbestos removal,” said Hecker.

The report also says that the EPA should notify all workers and nearby residents that were exposed during the tests.

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