

# Frequently Asked Questions Vermont Asbestos Group Mine Site

**July 2011**

## **What is the purpose of the upcoming community meetings?**

The purpose is to provide the community with an update on ongoing site activities and more information about the Superfund process and an opportunity for community members to ask questions about the process and why superfund listing is being pursued.

Based on this input from discussions with community members and groups, we will coordinate with EPA to ensure that the following topics are addressed at the meetings:

- The community involvement process throughout the entire Superfund process
- The process and criteria for selecting a remedial (cleanup) action
- The potential for including local hiring during the Superfund process
- Future use of the site after the site or a portion of the site is remediated

## **EPA has done work at the Vermont Asbestos Group Mine to control erosion. Isn't this work a Superfund action and why is more work necessary?**

The EPA Removal Program conducted work in 2007 and 2008 to mitigate water erosion issues at the mine site. The EPA Removal Program is a part of the Superfund Program, which addresses immediate and short-term responses only. The involvement of the EPA Removals Program does not necessarily mean that a site will end up on NPL.

The purpose of the work completed by the EPA Removal Program was to mitigate asbestos-containing runoff from reaching downstream waters. The mine operation was not managed with reclamation or closure in mind, which was typical during that time. Although the measures performed by the EPA Removal Program were valuable, they are not a long-term solution. Regardless of its Superfund status, the erosion of the piles and waste rock will continue to move asbestos-containing material into downstream waters until a detailed evaluation and long-term remedy (closure) is in place.

## **Material from the VAG mine has been used all over the area. If the VAG site becomes a Superfund site does this mean that all this material transported off site needs to be tracked down and removed?**

The issue of off-site transport and use of VAG material is independent of whether the mine site becomes a Superfund Site.

There are no plans for offsite investigation and/or mitigation related to off-site transport and use of VAG material. At this time, the VT ANR's approach to responding to "offsite" issues is on a complaint basis. Absent compelling new information, we do not

foresee changing this approach. As part of the settlement with G-1 Holdings, there is approximately \$5M available for characterizing potential “offsite” locations. So far, there have been no additional requests for assistance.

### **What is the status of the asbestos sampling performed by EPA in October 2008?**

Sampling conducted in October 2008 was designed to document the presence of asbestos and determine potential airborne asbestos exposure to the on-site residence, an adjoining seasonal residence, and trespassers using ATVs. The sampling method, known as activity-based sampling, simulates typical activities that can disturb the ground surface to release asbestos fibers into the air that could be inhaled. The activities simulated at the site were ATV riding, raking outside the two residences, and sweeping within the indoor residences.

In August 2009, the Agency of Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) issued its “Data Summary and Findings” based on the results of the October 2008 sampling. ATSDR stated that the results indicated a potential for exposure and made several recommendations including restricting access and continued monitoring for evidence of offsite migration. This fact sheet can be found on our website:

A copy of this fact sheet will also be available at the upcoming community meetings.

### **What is the status of the ongoing perimeter air monitoring at the site?**

The first two years of perimeter air monitoring at the site have been completed. The purpose of the monitoring is to measure ambient air quality at the site for asbestos and to monitor for possible offsite migration. The results of the first two years of monitoring suggest that airborne transport of asbestos fibers in ambient air conditions is not significant. The first year was completed by the EPA Removal Program in 2009. There were 10 stations and 15 sampling events from May 2009 through October 2009. The duration for a sampling event was either 10 or 24 hours. Out of 157 individual samples collected, asbestos fibers categorized as phase-contrast microscopy (PCMe) were detected in only two of those and of those two, there was only one fiber detected in each.

PCMe fibers are identified through transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and are equivalent to those fibers that would be identified with phase-contrast microscopy (PCM). This category is significant because most toxicity studies to determine health effects used PCM to quantify asbestos fibers. The use of TEM to determine PCMe is advantageous because the magnification is greater than PCM so that asbestos fibers can be distinguished from non-asbestos fibers.

As part of the bankruptcy settlement agreement, the Trustee hired by G-1 Holdings continued the air sampling program in 2010. Similar results to the 2009 study were documented. There were 19 sampling events at ten stations. Out of 182 total air samples, only four samples contained PCMe-sized fibers. Sixteen of the 19 sampling events had

no detects of PCMe-sized fibers. The scope of the 2011 sampling will be determined after reviewing the 2010 data. Copies of both reports can be found on our website.

Need to include website when finalized.

**How far along in the Superfund process is the Vermont Asbestos Group mine?**

EPA has completed final reports summarizing the Preliminary Assessment and Site Investigation activities that took place in 2008 and 2009. These activities included the collection of soil and sediment from the site and nearby downstream waters. Based on their analysis, it appears the VAG site is eligible for consideration for placement on the National Priorities List (NPL).

**What happens next now that the site appears to be eligible to be placed on the National Priorities List (NPL)?**

It is EPA's policy to obtain approval from a State's Governor before a site is proposed to the NPL. At such time that EPA and VT ANR determine that the site should be proposed to the NPL, a letter of concurrence in support of placing this site on the NPL will be requested from the Governor of Vermont. Such a request has not been made to date.

The Governor is continuing the policy of past Governors, which is to obtain local community support first before sending a concurrence letter to EPA.

After a site is proposed on the NPL, the listing is subject to a 60-day public comment period. After reviewing all comments, EPA will make a determination on whether to finalize the site on the NPL.

**We have heard cost estimates for remediation options ranging from approximately \$70M to \$500M. Why and how were these cost determined and will EPA be using these remediation options if the site is placed on the NPL?**

Typically at a potential NPL site, there is little information available about scope and cost for remediating the site. However, in the case of VAG mine, several preliminary remedial options and cost estimates have been developed. The \$500M cost estimate was an initial rough estimate prepared by an environmental consultant for the Vermont Asbestos Group to get a sense of the magnitude of a remediation effort. In support of the state and federal bankruptcy claim against G-1 Holdings, a successor to the former mine owner GAF, the U.S. Department of Justice hired a mine expert to develop more detailed options and estimates. This evaluation by the mine expert consisted of three scenarios that ranged in costs from \$135M and \$207M.

As a rebuttal to the government's estimate, G-1 Holdings estimated a cost of approximately \$70M for remediation. The VT ANR does not consider the G-1 Holdings option to be an effective long-term remedy. This option is unlikely to meet the minimum technical and regulatory requirements for remediating the site.

Although there are limitations to cost estimates for investigation, evaluation, and remediation at this early stage of project, the estimates provide insight into the scale of the potential remedy and that the size, scope and cost exceed state resources. The final remedy and cost could vary significantly from those developed in support of the bankruptcy case after a detailed investigation, feasibility study, and design are completed.

**Will there be opportunity for community involvement if this site becomes a Superfund Site?**

Yes. Community involvement is a major component of the Superfund program. At the July meetings, EPA will provide more specific information about the community involvement process. In addition, VT ANR will continue to involve the community in the process and work with EPA to ensure this interaction takes place for every step of the process. For example, at another mine site in Vermont, the community formed a citizen's advisory group that continues to meet on a regular basis with EPA and VT ANR to receive community input on project issues and plans.

**What is the state's involvement in the Superfund process?**

The state is involved throughout the process. If the VAG site became a Superfund site, it would be an EPA-lead site. For EPA-lead sites, the state is responsible to pay ten percent of the remedial action, and is responsible for the operations and maintenance of any features constructed as part of the remedial actions.

As part of the remedial process, EPA will develop a Record of Decision (ROD) that specifies the proposed remedial action and the justification for this action. Before the ROD is finalized, there will be formal public hearings. In addition, State concurrence on the ROD is necessary before EPA can take the next step. Furthermore, before

construction of the remedial action can move forward, EPA and the State must enter into a contract known as a State Superfund Contract. This contract specifies the obligations of each party, including financial obligations. If the state believes that the remedy, after consultation with the community, is not appropriate or affordable, then the state will not sign the contract.