

Handling Flood-Damaged Vermiculite Insulation and Soils Contaminated with Libby Asbestos

This fact sheet contains information about managing and disposing of vermiculite insulation and soils that may contain Libby mine-related asbestos

December 2025 Flooding

Damage caused by recent flooding has raised concerns regarding shifting or mobilization of mine-related asbestos-containing soils. Libby Amphibole asbestos (LA) is a naturally occurring mineral and a by-product from the past mining of vermiculite ore near Libby.

Identification

Vermiculite appears similar to mica as a flaky, black or gold material. Vermiculite sourced from the Libby mine is likely contaminated with Libby Amphibole asbestos fibers which are often not visible to the naked eye.



Asbestos fibers are typically a risk when airborne. Flooding isn't likely to result in immediate, acute health risks to residents. However, the flooding might have displaced or unearthed vermiculite from areas that either had known protective cover following EPA remediation (clean soil), or were previously unknown to contain the contaminant. Vermiculite may still be present in soils, attic and home foundations, and other relatively inaccessible areas. Once vermiculite dries out it can present an exposure risk. If vermiculite is present, it might contain LA. Exposure to LA could lead to such serious diseases as asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma.

Un-exfoliated



Exfoliated



The photo on the left is an example of raw vermiculite in soils. Heated vermiculite exfoliates (or pops), forming a lightweight material that was commonly used for attic/wall insulation shown in the photo on the right.

If you encounter vermiculite on your property do not disturb the material! – call the Asbestos Resource Program (ARP) immediately. ARP is able to provide information whether investigation and removal activities were completed by the EPA. ARP can provide an on-site inspection if the presence of vermiculite is suspected.

Precautionary Steps to Take

Debris removal, excavation or construction activities may uncover vermiculite at a property. If you encounter vermiculite, it is likely that it is contaminated with Libby Amphibole asbestos (LA).



Libby Amphibole asbestos with vermiculite ore in raw form (L) and asbestos fibers (magnified) (R)

Next Steps

AH 89E and @5FD are currently mapping flooded areas within the Libby Superfund Site to identify properties that may have been impacted by shifting or recently exposed vermiculite. LCARP will be conducting inspections and if contamination is identified, LCARP will make recommendations and removal are likely.



Lincoln County Asbestos Resource Program (ARP)
HOTLINE (406) 291-5335
For more information visit: lcarp.org

Libby Asbestos is Toxic

It should be avoided or handled with extreme care. Exposure to Libby Amphibole asbestos has resulted in disease in workers and non-workers who have had contact with contaminated materials. Take care not to bring any contaminated clothing or material back to your home or business. Treat any asbestos containing material as regulated material and comply with all state and local regulations. The health risk from exposure to all asbestos depends greatly on the amount of asbestos in the material you are disturbing and how long the exposure lasts. **There is no known threshold risk level for asbestos-related materials, and any exposure will increase the risk of asbestos-related disease.**

If you take the basic precautions outlined in this fact sheet, your risk from exposure will be less.

Common dust or surgical masks are not effective against asbestos fibers!



Wearing a respirator mask with a P-100 fine particulate HEPA filter is the best way to avoid breathing asbestos fibers. However, they must be used properly or exposure may still occur.

For more information on respirator requirements, visit OSHA's website: www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection

Learn about the risks of asbestos exposure and basic precautions by reviewing the Best Management Practices (BMP) resource fact sheets available at the **Lincoln County Asbestos Resource Program** or on the website: lcarp.org

- **Reducing Asbestos Exposure** – *How to reduce exposure to asbestos when renovating or excavating*
- **Lincoln County Do-It-Yourselfers** – *What to do if you find vermiculite or asbestos*
- **Demolition Activities** – *Precautionary steps to take before tearing down structures*
- **Contractors & Tradesmen Working Indoors** – *What to do if you find vermiculite or asbestos*
- **Libby and Troy Residents** – *Vermiculite or Asbestos in or around your home or business*
- **Yard Work and Gardening Activities** – *What to do if you find vermiculite or asbestos*
- **13 Simple Steps to Protect from Libby Asbestos** – *How to reduce exposure to asbestos*

Who Can I Contact With Questions About Asbestos?



**ARP
HOTLINE
(406) 291-5335**



**Montana
Asbestos Control
Program
(406) 444-5300**

The DEQ or ARP might send personnel out to inspect a situation involving vermiculite or LA. That guidance might include advising the owner to allow a licensed asbestos contractor or inspector to take samples, conduct cleanup, or take other special measures to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure. A list of licensed contractors and inspectors can be provided by contacting DEQ or ARP.

Montana law requires that employers hire a licensed inspector to determine if asbestos is present before doing any work. Asbestos that is not associated with the Libby vermiculite mine is still regulated by the Montana DEQ. If non-Libby asbestos is found, it should be dealt with according to Montana regulations. Explore Montana DEQ's Asbestos web site at: www.deq.mt.gov/Asbestos