

[EPA Tests Spokane Yards for Asbestos](#)

(Posted by Tom Lamb at www.AsbestosHUB.com on September 10, 2009; see <http://bit.ly/nUAmo>)

People living near W.R. Grace's former Zonolite factory in Spokane are having their yards tested for asbestos with new technology that can detect the presence of asbestos fibers at lower levels than before.

For Kandi Smith, watching two men in white hazmat suits and respirators dig 30 soil samples from her lawn wondered if passersby thought the hazmat response was part of a meth lab cleanup.

The soil testing was conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency.

For 22 years, Vermiculite Northwest produced Zonolite, an asbestos-tainted attic insulation. Rail cars brought vermiculite ore from Libby, Mont., to the plant on North Maple Street in Spokane, where furnaces heated the ore until it puffed up into lightweight insulation.

The EPA decided to retest the Spokane yards after the agency declared a public health emergency in Libby, where contamination from an old vermiculite mine has been cited in the deaths of more than 200 people. Thousands more are believed to suffer from asbestos-related illnesses, including asbestosis and mesothelioma.

The newer testing is more sophisticated. Old methods could detect asbestos at rates of 1 percent in soil samples. New testing can detect asbestos at rates of 0.25 percent in soil samples, and emerging methods show promise for detecting even smaller ratios.

EPA is testing soils at residences near the Vermiculite Northwest site, closed by W.R. Grace in 1973 after a whistle-blower tipped state inspectors to high asbestos levels inside.

EPA will spend between \$900 and \$1,400 on soil analyses for each yard. The agency also is sampling soils on county-owned property.

Depending on the results, the initial sampling could trigger additional yard testing.

The next step would involve taking air samples during common soil-disturbing activities, such as raking, moving the lawn or shoveling dirt.

Attorney [Tom Lamb](#) represents people in personal injury and wrongful death cases involving mesothelioma or other asbestos cancers. The above article was posted originally on his blog, **Asbestos HUB** – with active links and readers' comments.
<http://AsbestosHUB.com>