

# Lake Michigan Waiting for Answers on Threats of Mesothelioma Cancer

*Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tested the sands of Illinois' most popular beach on the shores of Lake Michigan for asbestos, residents are still under mesothelioma threats.*

[large]Beach Season Kicks Off at Illinois' Asbestos-Contaminated Beaches[/large]

[i]Considering the Illinois shoreline has an extensive history of asbestos contamination, the recent start of the 2008 beach season along Lake Michigan has prompted a local conservation group to issue advice on how beachgoers can minimize inhalation and ingestion of toxic asbestos fibers.[/i]

It was almost 11 years ago when the media first mentioned the presence of asbestos fibers at Illinois Beach State Park, which runs along a six-mile stretch of Lake Michigan. The popular beach is visited by more than two million people every year.

There are signs posted at locations where asbestos is known to have washed up on shore, warning people not to handle rocks and other suspicious material. However, children play at the beach regularly, and are less likely to take notice of the signs, or refrain from handling such material.

An investigation into the source of the asbestos has lead to five possible locations, including an old industrial site located south of the park.

State and federal officials have been saying for more than a decade that the beach is safe. However, according to a recent news report from the Sun-Times newspaper, there are internal EPA documents that raise serious concerns about the safety of the location.

In addition, a study carried out in 2006 showed there were "significantly elevated" levels of asbestos at the state park. The asbestos at the park includes amphibole fibers, which is commonly regarded as one of the most toxic and hazardous groups of asbestos. Amphibole fibers are considered a leading cause of malignant mesothelioma.

The EPA carried out more tests last year in an effort to resolve the public's safety concerns. Investigators performed normal beach activities such as volleyball and Frisbee-tossing to try and determine if normal activity could result in asbestos becoming airborne.

The public, as well as press, have been asking why the EPA continues to send out investigatory teams when state and local officials have been insisting the beach is safe for more than a decade.

According to a recent Sun-Times report, a national review panel said in August 2007 that

past studies to determine asbestos levels at the beach were not sufficient, and the panel did not have a high "level of confidence" in the safety of the beach.

The EPA said just last week that preliminary analyses of the beach environment "confirmed previous studies showing low levels of potential asbestos exposure for recreational users of the beach."

The EPA claims that asbestos levels are so low that there's "no cause for concern. However, according to the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, even low level exposure to the substance can eventually lead to the development of mesothelioma, a lethal cancer.

In addition, a 1997 publication by the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) states, "all levels of asbestos exposure studied to date have demonstrated asbestos-related disease" [and] there is no level of exposure below which clinical effects do not occur." Many are wondering why the EPA would allow Illinois state residents to be exposed to any level of asbestos, considering the compelling information reported by NIOSH.

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