



spotlight on health

Mesothelioma: What You Should Know

(NAPSA)—A northwest Montana town that's known for having a "toxic legacy" associated with asbestos contamination has finally gotten some good news from the Environmental Protection Agency: The town will be receiving more than \$130 million in cleanup and medical assistance.

A mine outside Libby, Mont., began producing vermiculite—a mineral often used in insulation—in 1919. Dust from the plant covered patches of grass, dusted the tops of cars and drifted through the air in a hazy smoke that became a part of residents' daily lives. But the product was contaminated with tremolite asbestos, a toxic substance that has since been linked to mesothelioma, a cancer that can attack the mesothelium, a protective lining that covers most of the body's internal organs, including the lungs, abdomen cavity and heart.

About Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is almost always caused by exposure to asbestos. Most people who develop the disease have worked on jobs where they inhaled asbestos particles, or they have been exposed to asbestos dust and fiber in other ways. Symptoms may not appear until 20 to 50 years after exposure to asbestos, and may include shortness of breath, cough and pain in the chest due to an accumulation of fluid in the pleural space (between the lung and the chest wall).

Community Exposure

There is thought to be many other towns and workplaces that are part of a microcosm of asbestos contamination. Libby, Mont., is an example of the thousands of neighborhoods surround-



Federal programs are helping people get the medical care they need after they've been exposed to asbestos.

ing manufacturing plants across the country that were being exposed to asbestos. Dust from the mine spread all over the town (and the neighboring town of Troy) for decades, and tailings from the facility were also used as fill for driveways, gardens and playgrounds. According to federal prosecutors, this community exposure resulted in more than 200 deaths and 1,000 illnesses.

If you think you have been exposed to asbestos fibers, and may have mesothelioma, your first responsibility is to your health—see your family doctor or go to a hospital immediately. Your second responsibility is to make sure that you get the ongoing care you need. Unfortunately, obtaining your legal, medical and financial rights can be a long, complicated process.

To learn more about mesothelioma, its symptoms and treatments, and your legal rights if you've been exposed to asbestos, visit www.secondarysickness.info.