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**PUBLIC JUSTICE TEAM URGES U.S. EPA TO HALT ILLEGAL
'WET METHOD' ASBESTOS REMOVAL IN FORT WORTH**

City Sets Experiment for Thursday, Endangering East Side Community

Hoping to spare a Fort Worth community the dread and danger of asbestos exposure, a Public Justice team is asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to postpone Thursday's scheduled asbestos abatement experiment on the city's east side at least until the EPA hosts another public meeting about the plan. The experiment violates federal law and, contrary to state law, the contractor hired to do the work has not been publicly disclosed or shown to be a licensed asbestos consultant.

"I would suggest this meeting not be held at the 'Country Club' but at a place more likely frequented by the residents," read a letter to the EPA by Scott L. Frost, an attorney with the Public Justice team. He was referring to a Nov. 15 meeting at the Woodhaven Country Club in Fort Worth – the only public hearing on a highly controversial plan to rid an old apartment building of asbestos by soaking the substance with water and detergent, which EPA calls the Alternative Asbestos Control Method (AACM), and commonly known as the "wet method."

On Wednesday, workers began preparing the Oak Hollow apartment complex at 5901 Boca Raton Boulevard for Thursday's scheduled "wet method" demolition of the complex's office building. Frost's letter noted that "the contractor for this project is not a licensed asbestos consultant in the State of Texas," an intractable requirement for such work.

The apartment complex is in an economically and racially mixed neighborhood and borders the upscale Woodhaven subdivision. Both groups of residents risk exposure to tiny asbestos fibers wafting in the air as the result of both the spraying and the demolition. If inhaled, the fibers can cause severe pulmonary-respiratory diseases, including lung cancer and mesothelioma.

"The EPA and the City of Fort Worth have made repeated misstatements to the press and the local residents," said Frost. "The EPA claims this is not the "wet method" but it hasn't told the residents that the only major difference in this new test is they have added foam to the water they intend to spray the buildings with prior to the demolition. They've told the community that the new method is just as safe as the already approved methods but when asked to respond with data to back up this claim, the EPA admitted it would be 'premature' to give the wet method a green light."

Following a 2006 test in which an asbestos-laden building at an abandoned army camp in Arkansas was soaked, the scientists who reviewed the test results recommended that the EPA declare that it "does not endorse the use of the AACM as an approved method."

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Jack Shine, an asbestos expert with the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers, noted that findings in a June 2007 EPA study “backs up our contention that this experiment has many serious problems and should absolutely not be implemented in the heart of a residential neighborhood.” Like Shine’s union, the Texas AFL-CIO joined Public Justice in opposing the City’s plan.

In repeated visits with residents in the area, the Public Justice team discovered that many residents had no idea of the City’s plans or what they should do to protect themselves from asbestos exposure. Although the City held a public hearing at the Woodhaven Country Club in mid-November, many residents said they had not heard about it.

“EPA and the City have not given the public a fair chance to comment on this test,” said Jim Hecker, Environmental Enforcement Director at Public Justice. “The public meeting took place before the plans for the test were even published.”

Still, the City insists that the technique is safe, emphasizing that it is less expensive than conventional methods of asbestos abatement – a miscarriage of priority noted by one EPA expert in the review of the 2006 Arkansas test.

“It is troubling that the issue of possible cost savings has been brought up in several places,” wrote the reviewer, “when in reality, the priority of state and federal agencies starts with protection of public/worker health.”

Despite these threats to the health and welfare of their constituents, City officials and some Woodhaven residents have shrugged off warnings, accusing opponents of having ulterior motives, without explaining what those motives might be.

“I have nothing to gain from my protest of the so-called wet method of asbestos removal,” said Ben DuBose, a lawyer on the Public Justice team. “The sad truth is that, if disease develops as a result of the asbestos released from this experiment, it will take decades to manifest itself.”

One supporter of the demolition even intimated that, if the “wet method” did not go forward, the alternative would be to let the building rot. Opponents note that no one is trying to salvage the decrepit buildings and that the City knows the real alternative is to employ the same safe, proven, conventional method of asbestos removal that it plans to use on the rest of the structures in the Oak Hollow complex.

“Unfortunately, the City has duped a lot of people into believing that this method has been proven safe,” said Deborah Mathis of Public Justice. “Even some of the Woodhaven homeowners are cheering for it, not realizing that their health is at stake. They can call us ‘outsiders’ if they must, but many local people are worried and the endangerment they face is, most decidedly, an inside job. We only sounded the alarm.”

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