

BoRit Asbestos Superfund Site Community Action Group Meeting

Ambler/Upper Dublin/Whitpain Pennsylvania

Date: Wednesday June 4, 2014

Location: Upper Dublin Township Bldg- 801 Loch Alsh Ave- Fort Washington PA 19002

Welcome & Announcements

Call to Order by Bob Adams at 6:35pm. Meeting minutes for April were approved and Bob Adams opened the floor to changes to the agenda. No changes noted.

Dr. Ted Emmett- New University of Pennsylvania Grant

Dr. Ted Emmett presented the group with a slide presentation entitled “Superfund Research Centers.”

Based on the discussions and activity at the BoRit Site, the University of Pennsylvania has received grant funding to explore 6 topical areas. This Center is one of 19 Superfund research centers across the country which are supported by the National Institute of Health. The with the intention of the Centers is “design of problem based, solution oriented research to address the needs of its primary stakeholders.” The projects of the University of Pennsylvania Center will directly correlate the theme of asbestos fate, exposure, remediation, and adverse health effects.

The new Center will tackle two inter-related environmental science studies and four biomedical science studies. The six projects were designed to address a community-based question or concern that have been previously identified in discussions at CAG and by community members. . (EPA added the following questions from the UPenn press release on the grant.)

- Can we remediate asbestos without moving it from the original disposal site?
- What do we know about the fate and transport of asbestos in the environment in soil and water?
- Which exposure pathways were responsible for the mesothelioma cluster in Ambler? Why is the excess rate higher in women?
- Is there genetic susceptibility to mesothelioma?
- Can asbestos-related disease be prevented by “chemo-prevention” such as through dietary supplements?
- Can we develop a blood test to determine whether a person will get asbestos-related disease?

Dr Ted Emmett noted that this effort reflects a new model of research, “bidirectional engagement” between university research and the affected community. For this effort, the “community engagement core” point person will be Aneezas Agha (aneeza.gha@upenn.edu). In addition to a community engagement core, Penn will have a translation core which will help translate information to governmental agencies, including the EPA. A website is in the development stage and Dr. Emmett welcomed input from the CAG.

Dr Ian Blair, Principal Investigator for the Center grant, was introduced and outlined several of the initiatives, current and forthcoming, envisioned by the grant to the University of Pennsylvania. The grant supports research both at UPENN and at Fox Chase Cancer Center. The research will use both environmental and biomedical science to capitalize on input from both areas.

Note: Doctors and research from both UPenn and Fox Chase Cancer Center are included in this summary.

1. A bidirectional study, between scientists and community, of the effects of asbestos.
2. A study on the transportation of asbestos due to currently limited data and study available on the effects of remediated asbestos.
3. The development of a blood test (biomarker) to help identify those at risk for mesothelioma, and those who have had significant asbestos exposure.
4. The merging of biomedical science and environmental science at Penn to capitalize on the research of both areas in regard to asbestos.

Dr Ted Emmett opened the floor for questions.

Otis Hightower: How will communities become educated about the research centers?

Dr. Ian Blair: The website will have information, and options for Twitter, blogging, for the community. We welcome any first person accounts to include on the website, how asbestos has affected you.

Otis Hightower: During major flooding in West Ambler, there was basement flooding- where soil was previously tested by EPA – has anyone visited and tested these houses?

Dr Ian Blair: Our researcher on this is currently in Puerto Rico- his project will address how asbestos is transported in soil and water and what changes take place. Currently, there is just not enough research on this.

Gordon Chase: In addressing asbestos in ambient air, this is our main question. How can we measure asbestos in the ambient air on an ongoing basis- this is a huge gap- if you can't measure, how can you proceed?

Dr Trevor Penning: Our research grant captures remediated asbestos and the transport of asbestos but perhaps there could be supplemental funding, so to embrace other topics. The merging of environmental studies with medical sciences at Penn is a huge step.

Sharon McCormick: Would there be any studies on ingestion?

Dr Ian Blair: On animal models, one of the investigators has found a predisposition to mesothelioma

Dr Ted Emmett confirmed that research would try to detoxify asbestos in the laboratory, science is evolving and if successful, the goal is to move from lab to real world.

Dr Trevor Penning described “bioremediation,” using biology to remediate the asbestos, if research proves substantial, perhaps funding will be added.

Dr Ted Emmett noted that the group will create an exposure model, trying to recreate a map of the Ambler area residents, including 1930 census data.

Dr Becky Simmons: Fox Chase has created an animal model to test for mesothelioma. We can expose animals to asbestos and remediated asbestos, using molecular tools, to design better therapies and a treatment course and to identify target biomarkers.

Dr Anil Vachani: A family with mesothelioma was studied at Penn; they had no known history of exposure.

Dave Froehlich: Will any other communities be involved?

Dr Ian Blair: Not at this time, but the plan would be to move outward to other communities, Dr Becky Simmons' study will help us develop a blood test.

Lora Werner: Interested in your research on effects of levels- sometimes testing low levels for research is different from general population low level exposure.

Dr Becky Simmons: We will test that on animal model, we also have a grant on endocrine disruption, and right now there is very little research on biomarkers for asbestos.

Discussion ensued on the goals of the studies, developing biomarkers, blood testing, and perhaps targeting a chemo preventive agent to those who had had initial exposure. Once the website is aligned with the ongoing research, the information will be available and dynamic.

Gordon Chase: What is the timeframe for the website?

Dr Trevor Penning: Hopeful should be ready in 2 months.

Gordon Chase noted that a website with both an archival section and a current, dynamic section will be useful.

Dr Anil Vachani addressed the current plan of action for Project 6, which includes targeting residents for Cat Scan and study, looking for chronic changes, and also outreach to the community. Several CAG group members suggested community health fairs and events as venues for outreach.

Diane Morgan: How will EPA work with Penn?

Joe McDowell: NIH is the focus for public health and what Penn provides to NIH will be sent to regional EPA toxicologist. As for remediation at any site we have, we act as gatekeeper.

Reservoir Status and Next Steps

Jill Lowe presented a slide show for status updates. Efforts are still ongoing to dewater the reservoir. Sal Boccuti provided a current aerial photo. The current plan is herbicide and filtration and approval is in place for a canoe/boat for herbicide application. Jill confirmed that the Army Corps of Engineers is still awaiting all data. Jill addressed the cloth material and bentonite liner, and shoring up the berm.

Discussion ensued concerning the pipe which continues to bring water into the area. Several measures, including dye, helped trace the water to its source. At issue is whether to seal the pipe from all contact with reservoir or allow a flow of clean water to it.

Andrew Salvadore discussed concerns of adequate signage at the reservoir and shared an anecdote of a resident who thought the area was a bird sanctuary instead of a superfund site. Additionally, Mr. Salvadore visited the area and noted possible scrap asbestos piping around uprooted trees. He also noted that the fence, which evidently needs repair, has stakes likely driven below the membrane of the asbestos cover and noted this could pose hazardous for removal. Additionally, truck tracks have been left, unclean, from the site.

Sharon McCormick noted that West Ambler residents had previously testified that asbestos waste had been used in their gardens and hoped EPA had addressed that issue in the past.

Joe McDowell offered sending residents a new fact sheet to the group, but noted that the fact sheet from 3-4 years ago solicited responses from residents with asbestos waste on their property/gardens and EPA received only one response of alert.

Old Business- Air Monitoring/ TASC Grant

Diane Morgan cited EPA emails from Ruth Wuenschel in regard to obtaining an aerosol expert for ongoing air monitoring. Carrie Dietzel spoke on behalf of EPA that Dr Webber presented extensive information to the group and, based on other EPA site actions and the new Penn research group that presented here, perhaps another expert would be a duplication of effort at this time. Sharon McCormick cited an example in Ambler Piles, where asbestos was left untested by EPA and expressed concern that BoRit will be another pile abandoned without further monitoring. Carrie Dietzel noted that the 5 year review is the EPA's means of revisiting the site.

Gordon Chase noted that the CAG group's intention for an ambient air expert was to develop a plan of "where and when" to place air monitors. Dr Ted Emmett interjected that a "sampling expert" as a source and suggested Dr. Peter Lees at Johns Hopkins University who is renowned for Lead sampling and could possibly provide input into asbestos sampling at BoRit. Carrie Dietzel confirmed that Dr. Lees as well as Dr. Webber could be included in the proposed plan stage. Ms. Dietzel further noted that all requests are filtered to the contractor, SKIO Solutions, who develops the work plan once requests are input.

Gessner

Gordon Chase expressed concern of the Gessner products redirecting water to the Wissahickon Creek while only testing water temperature and pH; the DEP is the lead but is not providing appropriate testing. Jill Lowe will contact DEP concerning this issue.

Adjourn

Bob Adams adjourned the meeting at 8:55pm.