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EPA launches 11 day test of sites

By: Matthew Self The Telegraph

Weighted with the task of determining the potential danger of airborne asbestos in El Dorado Hills, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched their 11-day stay in the area with a game of baseball.

It wasn't about fun and games, however.

The EPA demonstrated their testing procedures at a public event held Friday on a baseball diamond at El Dorado Hills Community Services District Community Park. The method, called "activity-based monitoring," involves taking air samples while simulating activities that might cause exposure to asbestos, like sliding into third base.

The EPA will be testing at four sites: Silva Valley School, Rolling Hills School, Jackson Elementary School and the district park. These areas were selected due to the high volume of children kicking up the dirt.

The test sites are also near a fault zone that runs adjacent to Silva Valley Parkway, according to the EPA. Asbestos occurs in rock and soil as the result of natural geologic processes, often near earthquake faults. Disturbance of naturally occurring asbestos can raise dust and release asbestos fibers into the air.

Other activities include soccer, basketball and dirt trails. EPA technicians will be wearing instruments that collect samples of airborne dust at breathing height.

Asbestos is a known carcinogen. When people inhale needle-like asbestos fibers their health may be at risk. One known asbestos-related disease is mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer in the cells that line an organ, such as the lungs or the heart.

There have been eight reported cases of mesothelioma in El Dorado County since 1996, according to the county's vital statistics records. It is not known if those cases involved El Dorado Hills residents or where the cancer was contracted.

EPA spokesperson Betsy Curnow said this kind of testing is critical to determine what procedures, if any, should be taken to ensure air quality for localized exposure to active children.

"We wanted to focus on public areas where children are at greater risk," she said. "We hope to find out if there are activities where children play where there is a high risk of exposure."

When questioned why the EPA wasn't testing for other activities, such as yard work, Curnow explained the EPA has done that at other sites across the country.

Asbestos-related diseases like mesothelioma take longer to develop, Curnow said, taking up to 30 or 40 years to show. The EPA's immediate concern is to determine if there is any immediate danger to those that are most susceptible, she said.

Naturally-occurring asbestos has been a known problem in the area, but it wasn't until Jenny Bard of Santa Rosa,



EPA officials demonstrated testing procedures at a public event held Friday at the El Dorado Hills Community Services District Community Park. Photo by Matthew Self/The Telegraph

petitioned on behalf of El Dorado Hills residents that the EPA became involved.

Bard was unavailable for comment at the time of publication.

Curnow said there are no standards to measure against and the EPA will be testing against the ambient air samples they will be collecting at the same time.

The EPA has already determined ambient air quality in El Dorado County to be good, results indicating similar or lower asbestos counts than in other counties. For comparison, they will also be taking activity-based samples in an urban area outside of El Dorado County.

Results of the tests will take two or three months to compile. The EPA has promised to make the results available to the public when completed. They will also contact residents by mail.

El Dorado Hills residents wanting to be included on the EPA's local mailing list can call their toll-free number, (800) 231-3075.

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