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Dec. 27, 2006- Don't you love labels

Yellow journalism is alive and well in Sacramento. Just label something as asbestos and the fear starts, especially with a headline "Study: Asbestos fears are justified."

In December of last year a report was released by the R.J. Lee Group, a prominent and respected research lab, that said of the asbestos found by the Environmental Protection Agency amounting to some 2,400 particles, only 42 of the fibers were of the size and shape to be considered dangerous, with most of the balance identified as a non-asbestiform amphibole mineral known as cleavage fragments.

Cleavage fragments, although sometimes difficult to distinguish from amphibole asbestos fibers, are not toxic. In fact there are no epidemiology studies that attribute any toxicity to such cleavage fragments and other studies done on cleavage fragments show that they do not act like amphibole asbestos and do not break down as such. As a result of the differing "opinions," the EPA deferred to another government agency, the United States Geological Survey, to determine what kind of fibers the EPA had collected in El Dorado Hills.

As you would expect, the USGS said that the minerals although not conforming to the traditional commercial definition of asbestos, as stated by the R.G. Lee Group was still within the accepted definition based on size, shape and chemical composition to be counted as asbestos for health studies. EPA official Dan Meers offered this ludicrous statement that there is a continuum from asbestiform to fibrous to acicular to prismatic to cleavage fragment.

"These things grade into one another in a single outcropping, they'll graduate into one another in a distance of 1 to 2 feet."

The next thing you know Meers will be correcting Einstein with this "continuum" thing. Actually that statement is false in that cleavage fragments cannot become, turn themselves or morph into one of the several dangerous amphibole asbestos fibers such as tremolite, actinolite, amosite, anthophyllite or crocidolite.

If we analyze such bull or government speak, it makes absolutely no sense, especially since only about 1 percent of the fibers collected by the EPA from the study area in El Dorado Hills could even be considered amphibole asbestos. Asbestos is toxic in certain forms and non-toxic in others, and over 99 percent of the material gathered by the EPA is of the non-toxic, non-asbestiform amphibole cleavage fragment types and that has not been disputed and in fact confirmed by the USGS study.

But what the EPA has done is to label the non-toxic, non asbestiform amphibole cleavage fragments as "asbestos," therefore they have become dangerous. So that means if you can get some government agency to state that sand, cellulose or some other substance is asbestos, it is dangerous to inhale. Just think if sand were called asbestos, the beach would be off limits.

Certain kinds of asbestos are dangerous to your health, with most of that danger determined from occupational studies of factory workers who in the past came in contact with large quantities of the amphibole fibers of tremolite, amosite and crocidolite in concentrations thousands of times greater than that of El Dorado Hills. There are no occupational studies of any kind that show any danger from cleavage fragments that have now been labeled as "asbestos" by the USGS using a broad definition and therefore dangerous through the use of convoluted government speak. But does that make them a health risk? The EPA has no evidence either by epidemiology study, medical analysis or other

scientifically acceptable method that cleavage fragments are a health risk.

However, there is some evidence that living in El Dorado Hills is not a health risk. Starting with the Gold Rush, that part of the county has been farmed, mined and lived in. In about 1962, El Dorado Hills development began in earnest and has continued ever since. Oak Ridge High School opened in about 1980 and the western part of the county for the last 45 years has been dug up, graded and built upon with dirt roads being plied by big trucks on a daily basis for years without any dust control whatsoever. The result is no asbestos related disease of any kind that can be attributed to the surrounding environment. Contrary to what was reported in the Bee, study fears are not justified.

This is just another example of federal government arrogance and why an investigation is necessary regarding at least Region 9 of the EPA, which has become a renegade government agency with an agenda that is concerned more about its own face and power than science or the well-being of the citizens of the United States, the very people they are supposed to serve. Instead they do things such as what they have done in El Dorado Hills to help themselves and hurt whomever is in their way. That is called an egregious abuse of power.

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