

**Asbestos safety program underway with building checks & info sessions**



**Consultant Clint Berschiminsky checks for asbestos in pipe insulation in a mechanical room in the U of S Health Sciences Building recently. Berschiminsky is conducting an inspection of all campus buildings.**



**Asbestos control Consultant Clint Berschminsky posts a sticker at the entrance to a room in the Health Sciences Building, which advises U of S employees if asbestos is in the area, where it is, and if any precautions have to be taken.**

**By Michael Robin**

A program is underway to create an accurate inventory of asbestos at the University of Saskatchewan and inform the campus community of its location and its potential hazards.

The program kicked off with a letter and brochure distributed across campus late last fall by the Department of Health, Safety and Environment (DHSE). At the same time, Facilities Management Division (FMD) hired consultant Bersch & Associates to conduct a comprehensive inventory.

The consultant's building inspections have begun, with visits in recent weeks to the Biology and Health Sciences Buildings. The plan calls for inspections to begin soon in the Williams Building.

The consultant inspects all building areas, then posts labels to show the type of asbestos present and its condition.

A series of information sessions has also begun. According to Fulton Briand, Registered Occupational Hygienist with DHSE, the sessions provide information and a chance for people to voice their concerns. Martin Rempel of the University's Human Resources Division is facilitating the sessions. Speakers include Briand along with Clint

Berschiminsky, Regional Manager for Bersch & Associates and Carla Forester, Safety and Environment Manager in Facilities Management.

Asbestos is a fibrous mineral used in a range of applications such as floor tiles, pipe insulation and spray-on fireproofing on structural steel in buildings. Its resistance to heat and solvents makes it ideal for other uses like in fume hoods and emergency fire blankets.

Its use in construction was abandoned in the 1970s in Canada after it was found to be linked to lung-related illnesses such as asbestosis and mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer. Briand says that according to safety & occupational hygiene literature, mesothelioma occurs naturally at a rate of 10 per million in men and four per million in women. For individuals exposed to airborne asbestos fibres, clinical signs of these diseases typically show up from a few years to decades after exposure.

In 1987, external consultant D. J. Hosking was retained to oversee air testing in U of S buildings where asbestos was known to be present. According to his report, "These tests suggested that the amount of asbestos dust in the air of the rooms was no greater than that normally found throughout Saskatoon."

Subsequent to this, and in response to concerns raised by campus community from time to time, DHSE conducted tests in several locations. No asbestos fibres were detected.

Briand says it's important to remember asbestos is only dangerous if it gets into the air and is then inhaled. Friable asbestos, or that which can be crushed easily by hand when it's dry, is most likely to go airborne. However, asbestos in wallboard, tiles, or some other matrix can also be a problem if it is drilled, sanded or otherwise disturbed. FMD management and staff have been trained on how to work with asbestos and have procedures in place.

The current audit was launched after Saskatchewan Labour issued a notice of contravention to the University in November 2001. The order cited major deficiencies, including an incomplete inventory. While some of the asbestos on campus was identified in 1986-87, this information didn't reflect renovations done since then.

The current effort will fill in any gaps. In the process, a computer database will be created, making it much easier to keep the information current than with the original paper-based inventory. This database is maintained by FMD. The initial inventory phase is expected to be complete by December 2004, after which the maintenance program will keep it up to date.

Health and Safety information about asbestos and about upcoming information sessions can be obtained by calling Briand at 966-8511.