



PRESS INFORMATION

Purpose of International Symposium:

Minnesotans have been interested in the issue of mineral fibers in taconite ore – particularly from the eastern end of the Iron Range – since the Reserve Mining Case in the 1970s highlighted the presence of “asbestosiform minerals” in that ore body. Since then, numerous studies have been conducted on the ore, as well as people who work in the mining industry; however, due to a number of reasons including study limitations and lack of current scientific data, many significant questions remain unanswered.

The Blue Ribbon Committee on Mining, an interdisciplinary group convened by the State of Minnesota and the Office of Congressman James Oberstar, and the state’s Minerals Coordinating Committee each have identified the lack of up-to-date scientific research to help address unanswered questions as a stumbling block to further development of minerals from the eastern end of the Iron Range, including taconite, non-ferrous minerals and waste rock from taconite processing, which can be used as aggregate. In 2001, the Blue Ribbon Committee formed a task force to plan a symposium to help addressing these issues.

Meanwhile, two related events occurred that further have increased Minnesotan’s interest in mineral fibers. First, reports in 2001 that a vermiculite mine in Libby, Montana, might have been contaminated with asbestos led the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to study the health risks of residents in Northeast Minneapolis who might have been exposed to vermiculite-containing asbestos that was processed at a nearby insulation plant. Second, in March 2003 the MDH released a multi-year study on Minnesota iron miners who contracted mesothelioma – a rare form of cancer linked to exposure to asbestos. The study concluded that exposure to commercial asbestos in the workplace – not necessarily taconite ore – was the **likely** cause of the reported mesothelioma cases.

The International Symposium on the Health Hazard Evaluation of Fibrous Particles Associated with Taconite and the Adjacent Duluth Complex will convene international experts in the field of fibers and their associated health risks to present state-of-the-art, up-to-date research findings and to engage in panel discussions on those findings. The goals are to provide current information on risk-assessment

models and scenarios on health hazards associated with inhaling or ingesting fibrous particles – particularly those produced from the processing of taconite ore; to establish a scientific framework to address fibrous minerals that may be associated with non-ferrous mineral deposits and to establish a scientific basis for public policy decisions based on the current state of scientific knowledge.

Papers presented at the symposium will undergo a thorough peer-review process before being compiled – along with an edited version of panel discussion – in a monograph that will be provided to state agencies in the first quarter of 2004. Agencies will be able to use this scientific data as one source of information gathered during their public decision-making processes for permits, health risk assessments, clean-up levels, etc.