

Citations

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selected spot checks of potential trouble areas. She says she assumed that the asbestos-covered steam pipes in campus buildings were mostly behind walls.

Until this citation, the University operated on the assumption that only a small core of workers, principally in the heating plant, needed a program of training and protection.

The University Physical Plant has primary responsibility on campus for handling asbestos. "The highest priority we have now is asbestos, although we don't have any extra money specifically for it," says Harold Babcock, the director of the physical plant.

Bailey says asbestos has become a top priority in his office, and a good asbestos policy has been evolving.

"When I arrived about a year and a half ago, there was no formal campus asbestos policy," Bailey says. "The air monitors required for asbestos jobs were not even functional."

"We are trying hard to get our act together, but when you are starting from scratch it is a big job," he says.

His primary responsibility is radiation safety, Bailey says. With a staff of one secretary and one part-time technician, "there is not a lot of time for the many other responsibilities of this office."

Ray Hawk, vice president for administration and finance, agrees that the citation was an eye-opener. The University has invested considerable time and money in its safety program and has developed a sound asbestos policy, Hawk says.

"Where we broke down was a lapse of continuity," he says.

The University's safety policy stresses decentralization, placing responsibility for safety on department heads and their supervisors, Hawk says. Departments can draw on the expertise and resources of the public safety department, which includes Bailey's office.

"We have not been doing as good a job as I thought," Babcock says of the asbestos problem. "The citation told me we have some work to do."

And steps have been taken in response to the citation, he says.

Two labor crew members have been assigned to clean the 2.3 miles of tunnels under the campus and to cover the damaged pipe insulation with a protective metal casing. The project, which costs nearly \$3,000 a month in labor expenses alone, may take two months, he says. The workers are being monitored with air sampling devices and have received careful training and protective equipment.

Asbestos training has been available to the physical plant staff, and the required physical examinations for asbestos workers have been conducted, Babcock says.

He also has assigned an employee on a 90-percent time basis to develop a department safety policy and manual.

Until recently, the physical plant had one employee working 30 percent of the time on safety.

Manpower is a major problem, Babcock says. Two years ago, he lost 30 workers — about 12 percent of his staff.

Interviews with physical plant employees reveal that the asbestos problems are longstanding.

Mike Hostetler, acting foreman in the heating and ventilation shop, has worked on the steam pipes since 1979. One of the employees named in the citation, Hostetler says he did not understand the asbestos risk until last spring, when he attended an informal asbestos training session that Bailey conducted.

He does not remember wearing an asbestos-approved mask before last spring — although they were available — because he was not aware of the nature of the asbestos hazard, Hostetler says.

Before that time, he occasionally wore a dust particle mask and disposable protective overalls but only to "keep the dust off."

He was not following approved procedures during the inspection and had never been monitored as required, he says.

Jerry Dominy, a physical plant laborer also mentioned in the citation, says that until this fall he had not received asbestos training during his 11 years working for the University, in spite of a written request for safety training he submitted last year.

Dominy was assigned to clean the tunnels as part of the annual maintenance program and was unaware that regulations required air monitoring or special handling and disposal procedures, he says.

He would crawl over the torn pipe insulation in the tunnels and through the dust and would pick up asbestos debris without a mask or other precautions.

He thought the dust that collected on the pipes was "just dust," he says.

He recalls one job several

years ago when he and another laborer had to pull the asbestos lining off a hot water tank in an Amazon Housing mechanical room.

"The dust was so thick on my arms I could not see my hands," he says. Unaware of wetting procedures that reduce airborne particles, the workers swept up the dust and put it in a trash can.

Regulations call for asbestos debris to be contained in sealed containers, such as plastic bags, and deposited in clearly marked containers.

Strict government standards require laundering of asbestos-laden clothes in monitored conditions and with the knowledge of the people involved.

Dr. Indu Rughani, pulmonary specialist with the Eugene Hospital and Clinic, says that experts would probably agree that sporadic exposure to asbestos fibers, such as might occur in Mac Court or occasional worker contact is probably not "clinically significant."

Rughani says asbestos is a far more common problem than most people realize. He sees an average of a patient a month with asbestos-related lung disease.

The disease can be benign, with no clinically significant manifestations — as with thickening of the pleural tissue surrounding the lungs — or it can be fatal — involving scarring of the lung tissue (asbestosis), lung cancer and malignant mesothelioma. Research indicated that asbestos also may be related to other cancers, he says.

"We are going to see a lot more asbestos disease," he says. "What we see now is just the tip of the iceberg."

Asbestos

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Closing Mac Court would only become necessary if airborne levels cannot be contained during the work, or if levels are found to exceed state standards at other times, Bailey says.

If Mac Court has to be closed, says athletic department events manager Steven McBride, the men's basketball team might consider practicing at South Eugene High School.

Exposed insulation in itself does not pose a health hazard, Bailey says. Asbestos has been shown to be a potent carcinogen only when the

microscopic fibers are disturbed, become airborne and are inhaled. State and federal standards have set allowable workplace limits based on fiber size, concentration and the duration of a person's exposure, he says.

Removing an asbestos problem is difficult because disturbing the material and releases high levels of the nearly indestructible fibers, Bailey says.

The sporadic, short-term exposure a person may get in a building like Mac Court is probably not a health hazard,

Bailey says.

The disintegrating pipe insulation in Mac Court was first noticed about three weeks ago by Bailey, while he was observing a work crew operation.

"I could not believe my eyes," he says. He asked workers there if there were other pipes on campus in similar condition and was told there were.

The operation in Mac Court began Monday morning in a state of confusion over proper procedures. Kirkland directed his crew to begin work without first coordinating the project

with Bailey's office.

The workers, who contacted Bailey's office, were sent back to the physical plant by Don Brooks, assistant director of the department of public safety. There they unloaded their supplies but were directed by Kirkland to reload them and return to Mac Court that afternoon when Bailey would be able to set up monitoring equipment required by state regulations.

According to Babcock, the confusion was only a misunderstanding.

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