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## White House Aides Endangered By Asbestos, Too

**C1572. The Los Angeles Times**  
WASHINGTON — When Charles Poole started chugging up those five flights of stairs every morning in the New Executive Office Building — where many White House aides work — he thought it would make him healthier.

But soon he began to worry about the strange-looking, thick, grey material that hung like moss from the stairwell ceilings. A public health specialist by profession, Poole suspected immediately that it was asbestos, a hazardous substance known to cause lung cancer and other serious respiratory diseases.

And he was afraid that the stairways of the prestigious government building — which houses, among other agencies, the Council on Environmental Quality — were riddled with it.

Poole turned out to be right. A former employee of the council who now works for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), he recently went back to the building and took a sample. A lab analysis confirmed his worst fears: Not only was the substance asbestos, but its con-

centration was 30 times higher than current EPA regulations permit.

Technically, no laws are being violated, because the building was constructed in 1965, several years before EPA passed rules that severely curtailed asbestos use as insulation, and as a fire and noise retardant.

But there is a certain irony that the building's employees — many of whom are charged with monitoring the public environment — are facing potential danger in their own.

"I sure wouldn't go up and down those stairs again," Poole said. "I would advise all those people there to stay away."

"This finding suggests there is a real hazard here," Nathan Karch, the environmental council's acting senior staff member for toxic substances and environmental health. "It makes all the policy implications of using asbestos all the more real when it's close to home. I'd like to urge the EPA and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) to start taking a closer look at office buildings — especially this one."

The danger from asbestos com-

es from inhaling the tiny fibers. If the asbestos is sealed somehow, the danger decreases. In this building — where employees of the Office of Management and Budget, the Council on Wage and Price Stability, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy also work — the asbestos is not bonded or sealed in any way.

But officials at EPA and OSHA, who share some of the authority in regulating asbestos, say they have higher priorities than office buildings — although they do acknowledge the likelihood that a widespread problem exists.

"The problem is much bigger than that particular building — I would say the problem is quite extensive," said Steven D. Jellinek, EPA's assistant administrator for toxic substances. "We just don't know how many public buildings around the country have this problem. But we do know that many school buildings and public buildings constructed between 1948 and 1973 were sprayed with it."

EPA is now preparing a set of voluntary guidelines to help school districts identify asbestos problems.

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