

"I was extremely surprised by the severity of the contamination, based on what I had been told the situation was," said Kolb.

There was good reason for Kolb's surprise. The building's former owners had simply walked away from the site, leaving literally hundreds of tons of asbestos behind. While most cases of asbestos contamination involve limited amounts of asbestos in contained areas, this was different. Evidence of the building's former use was everywhere. Pipes, walls, floors, equipment — all were coated with "friable" asbestos; that is, asbestos that is likely to crumble under hand pressure, releasing the tiny asbestos fibers into the air. These airborne asbestos fibers, when inhaled, are linked to numerous serious and often fatal ailments including lung, colon, stomach, and rectal cancers, and asbestosis, a lung disease. Federal regulations prohibit any demolition which could release these fibers into the atmosphere, leaving Kolb just two choices—forget the project, or find a way to remove the mountains of asbestos that lay inside the warehouse.

Despite the severity of the problem, "We never considered abandoning the project," said Kolb. "We just went out and found the best experts in asbestos removal we could find."

The experts Kolb went to were from Insulation Technologies, Inc. The Harvey-based firm had been active in asbestos abatement projects throughout the southeast for several years, but even after hundreds of projects the extent of contamination in the IBP building was still a shock.

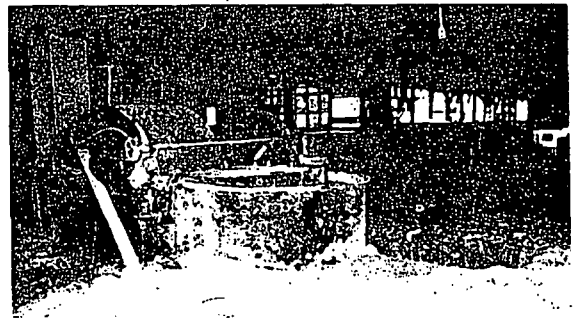
"It was without a doubt the worst case of asbestos contamination we had ever seen," said Insulation Technologies president, Lloyd Gautreaux. "The entire five-block complex was awash in asbestos fibers.

"Most removal cases involve asbestos that was once firmly affixed and has begun to loosen. In that situation, removal is pretty straightforward. Here, nothing had been intentionally applied. There was just a dust that coated every surface in the warehouse, often to a depth of five inches or more."

"The project just would not have been economically feasible using conventional abatement methods," said Larry Zimmer of Insulation Technol-



*Gross contamination of friable asbestos coated every surface in the warehouse, often to a depth of several inches.*



ogies. "The area to be cleared was literally hundreds of times larger than most asbestos removal projects. Instead of a small boiler room or classroom, we were faced with a huge warehouse. We knew we had to find a new way to remove the tons of asbestos fibers inside the building."

The solution came from project manager Bob Kieferle, who proposed

sealing off the building completely and using pressure washers to scrub the asbestos off. Kieferle's innovative plan required a special approval from the Environmental Protection Agency before work could begin. Several other agencies were informed of the plan as well.

"We asked for a meeting with Bill Davis of the Louisiana Department of