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Dangers Cited In First Tests On Asbestos

There may be dangerous asbestos particles in the air over New Melones reservoir according to preliminary findings, the Army Corps of Engineers reported late yesterday.

Carl Greenstein, public affairs officer for the corps, said dust samples taken at New Melones by researchers from Sacramento's McClellan Air Force base indicated "this may be the dangerous, cancer provoking particle."

He stressed, however, the finding is only preliminary and that the samples have been sent to experts in Cincinnati for confirmations.

Test results are not expected much before Aug. 20, Greenstein said.

An issue is just blowing over New Melones from the Pacific Asbestos plant on the north side of Tulloch reservoir.

Particles falling from the sky were first noticed by corps of engineers employees living in mobilehomes near the Melones dam project, and they requested an investigation.

Philip Holmes, president of Pacific Asbestos Corp., at that time reacted by saying "someone pushed the panic button."

He discounted any danger from dust clouds blowing from the plant.

"If there is any asbestos fiber there, it's in such minute quantities that it can't do any harm," he said.

He pointed out the dust clouds have existed since the plant was opened 10 years ago and that no ill effects have been felt by employees.

Greenstein, however, yesterday said the effects of asbestos particles in one's lungs may not be felt for 20 years.

He also confirmed once asbestos particles are taken into the body, the body has no way to flush them out.

Should experts in Cincinnati support the McClellan findings, what will the corps do?

"We're not in any position to tell Pacific Asbestos to quit operating," Greenstein replied.

He called the controversy a "highly charged political issue" and said the corps "doesn't plan to issue a cease-and-desist order."

Rather the corps would report its findings to the state air resources board and the federal department of labor so that either of them could take action, he noted.

The corps main concern with the problem, said Greenstein, is over "the health hazard, if any, to our employees or our contractors' employees."

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