ASBESTOS EXPOSURE IN SCHOOLS

Introduction

We are conducting a study to determine the potential for asbestos exposure in schools, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Labour. It is possible that older school buildings in Ontario have asbestos containing materials that may be deteriorating, and when disturbed become airborne and settle onto surfaces. Routine housekeeping or maintenance work has the potential to expose workers, or further contaminate the building environment, through re-suspension of these fibers if present in the settled dust.

We propose to examine at least 30 school buildings across Ontario in the summer of 2016 for potential asbestos containing materials, and collect surface wipe samples to determine the presence of asbestos. Surface sampling is being conducted over air sampling as we anticipated that the airborne concentration of asbestos present may be too low to detect without direct disturbances to the asbestos containing material during air sampling. Surface sampling is an efficient and effective method for detecting the presence of asbestos fibres; but it does not allow the determination of airborne concentrations and cannot be used to determine compliance.

Cooperation of the School Board – Expectations

We aim to identify at least 4 district school boards across Ontario to grant us access to schools built before 1975 with known or suspected asbestos containing material. To be eligible the schools cannot be closed or undergoing any major renovations, and must have staff present to grant access to the school during the 2016 summer period.

Risks/Benefits

Anonymity and confidentiality of the results will be maintained. School boards will be provided with individual sampling results; however, individual results will not be released publically in reports or presentations. A report summarizing the results will be generated and circulated to the school boards, unions, Ministry of Labour, and made publically available on our website. The names of the participating schools, or school boards, will not be included in any reports or any publications that result from this study.

The findings will benefit the participating schools, the public sector unions and labour groups, Ontario Ministry of Labour, as well as the Public Services Health and Safety Association as it will provide information on the potential for asbestos exposure in schools across the province.

Investigators

This study is conducted by Dr. Paul Demers, the Director of the Occupational Cancer Research Centre at Cancer Care Ontario and Professor at Dalla Lana School of Public Health (University of Toronto) and Dr. Tracy Kirkham of Dalla Lana School of Public Health (University of Toronto) in collaboration with the Public Services Health and Safety Association. For any questions, or concerns with this study please contact:

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