

# Fears confirmed about natural asbestos contamination in Sacramento suburb

By BRIAN MELLEY  
The Associated Press

EL DORADO HILLS, Calif. — A huge cloud of construction dust blowing across the field where his son played Little League signaled to Lance McMahan it was time to get out of this fast-growing suburb above Sacramento.

Watching from a lawn chair as bulldozers reshaped a nearby hillside into another setting for high-priced homes, McMahan knew that the ground getting torn up and carried by the wind over the baseball diamond contained natural veins of asbestos.

"That was like the last straw," said McMahan, recalling the day six years ago when he decided his family's health was more important than staying in their foothills home of five years.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently confirmed the fears of McMahan and many other people in El Dorado Hills, but also created a dust-up over property values and the pace of development in this wealthy community of 31,000 residents, where the median home price in May was

\$566,000.

In tests completed last October, the agency found elevated levels of a naturally occurring but particularly dangerous type of asbestos fiber at playing fields, a popular bike trail and a playground for toddlers. But the agency hasn't been able to quantify the risk to residents.

"It's bad, we just don't know how bad," said Jere Johnson, EPA's assessment manager for the site.

While the findings have led some to consider leaving, most folks are staying put for now. Some are angry at EPA for singling out their community without explaining the chances of getting cancer from inhaling invisible airborne asbestos fibers, which has led to finger-pointing and charges of fear-mongering.

"We're not concerned about it," said Tom Ellenburg, who lives in a neighborhood near where the testing was done. "We don't sit around and breathe asbestos dust. We could go out in the street and dig around in it and sniff it up, but we don't do that."

Danger from asbestos has lurked over communities worldwide for

generations, largely as a byproduct of mining or industry. It was once widely used in many household products, including home insulation.

If inhaled, the needle-like asbestos fibers can cause life-threatening asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma, an incurable cancer of the chest lining.

Asbestos is found in 44 of California's 58 counties, usually in serpentine, the state rock. In its natural form it's considered harmless unless disturbed.

But the situation in El Dorado Hills is considered a greater threat by EPA because a more toxic form of asbestos, tremolite, is present and can be found close to the surface or even exposed.

Because it can take 20 to 40 years to develop an asbestos-related ailment, children are at a higher risk of exposure during their lifetime. In El Dorado Hills, a community planned a little more than a quarter century ago, that fact has been greeted with gallows humor.

Middle-aged residents joke that they needn't worry: they'll be dead before any disease is detected. Even their children have displayed a macabre outlook.

Some seniors sported T-shirts last year bearing the slogan, "I survived Oak Ridge High School asbestos," on the front. The back read, "Or did I?"

Terry Trent, a construction consultant who was the first to draw widespread attention to the problem, offers informal asbestos tours, getting wary looks from homeowners as he combs back tall grass looking for the culprit in the eroded embankments beyond their driveways.

"You can see how flaky this is," he said as a piece of the silvery white fiber corroded in his hand. "This whole hillside is shot through with tremolite."

The hill is above the high school and adjacent to the community center.

The EPA's Superfund unit, charged with cleaning up life-threatening hazardous waste, performed the testing after spending \$1.2 million to clean up asbestos on the grounds of Oak Ridge High School.

In October, contractors in white suits and respirators spent a week simulating child's play to measure exposure. In the name of science, they slid into the bases on the ball field, pedaled and jogged along a popular trail, played basketball and soccer and gardened behind an elementary school.

calls.

"It's always a challenge. In the winter when it's wet, you can get stuck. In the summer, it's all dust and sand, and you can get stuck in that. It happens quite frequently," said Tim Crews, director of the county's Emergency Medical Service. "If we could get a dirt road that acted like a paved road, that would be a great help to us."

Settles says Pave-Zyme makes a road good for five to seven years, shorter than asphalt paving but still an improvement from plain dirt, although road officials were skeptical.

Experts warn the Pave-Zyme idea probably isn't a low-cost cure-all. Other hardeners have been tried before, and products

a quarterly newsletter on road technology for the Georgia Department of Transportation.

"If you want a road to be like it's paved, you've got to pave it," Rice said. Dirt road improvements are especially troublesome in the South, where heavy rains and hot summers work against road hardeners, he said.

"You really have to have something you can hold together real tight," such as gravel used in pavement, he said. "Dirt's not made to hold together like that. It gets brittle, and it can crack."

But Rice and other transportation officials aren't completely dismissing Pave-Zyme. The Georgia DOT is monitoring the Atlanta test and may consider endorsing it for local use

Calendar

You won't want to miss it. It provides you with opportunity to lead in fostering collaborations. So get ahead of the online instead! Keynote speaker: Wahl, comments from Lt. Corporation. Organization: American (CMAA) Information: No Details Available Where: Coast Highway, Huntington

## FRIDAY, NOV 18 - GOLF ENGINEERING & GENERAL

This is a "No Frills" - "No a Good Time with Your Fr Teams. Organization: Eng Information: Amber Scott \$150.00 When: Hours: 6:00 Country Club, 3199 Stonefield

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### BASIC ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY

In this 390 hour course learn ment, including the use and care trial level skills in connecting and workmanship standards, color coding. (Mondays to Fridays, 6/ College/Centre City Center Inform 7:00 AM - 10:00 AM Where: City 92101

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### ELECTRONIC TECHNICIAN

In this 700 hour course learn g sion and other sound systems. Tr ry in repair of malfunctioning elec Organization: San Diego Commur 4500 Cost: No Cost When: Hour 5348 University Ave., San Diego

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### ELECTRONIC TEST TECHNICIAN

In this 900 hour course learn f theory and digital technology: pro Certified Electronic Technician equipped laboratory. (Mondays t Community College/Centre City ( When: Hours: 5:00 PM - 8:30 PM San Diego, 92101

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### COMMERCIAL PRINTING OPERATIC

This course is an open entry/ required for employment as a pre ations, and bindery operations. Tr paper stocks and materials, biddi layout and design, computer gene masking and platemaking, prop bindery operations. (Mondays t Community College/ECC Informa 7:00 AM - 1:00 PM Where: Educ Room 122, San Diego

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### ELECTRONIC PREPRESS OPERATION

An open entry/open exit mod employment as a pre-press operat er or bindery operator with supp includes safety procedures, stocks of job work orders, layout and desi camera operation, masking, platen bindery equipment. (Mondays t Community College/ECC Informa 7:00 AM - 1:00 PM Where: Educ Room 122, San Diego

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### STAMP MAKER/PRINTER

This course is designed to prov making rubber stamps. Classroom tools and equipment, composing stamps using vulcanization and m stamp molding, and assembling fir students will use includes: vertica machine, small and large vulcanize saw. (Mondays to Fridays, 6/1 College/North City Center Informa When: Hours: 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM San Diego Mission Road, Room 10

## MONDAY, AUG 1 - CLASSES

### BASIC ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY

In this 390 hour course learn fu ment, including the use and care of trial level skills in connecting and s workmanship standards, color coding. (Mondays to Thursdays, 6/ College/ECC Information: (619) 3 9:00 PM Where: Educational Cultu San Diego

## TUESDAY, AUG 2 - CLASSES

### BACKHOE OPERATOR

This class is predominantly a h operation. Topics include: equipme dures and loading procedures. Org 621-2313 www.safetycouncilonline AM - 5:00 PM Where: TBA, Please

## THURSDAY, AUG 4 - CLASSES

### PREVAILING WAGE LAW FOR PROJE

Specialized training on how to an and supervise Prevailing Wage Pro. Contractors, Inc. Information: Ga When: Starts: 9:30 AM Where: AE 92064

## FRIDAY, AUG 5 - SOCIAL EVENT:

### 4TH ANNUAL ABC PAC TRAP & S

Shooter packages will include st

## Construction Notebook—

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