



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner of Education

J. Robert Galvin, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A.
Commissioner of Public Health

DATE: June 26, 2007

Subject: Potential Asbestos Hazard in Art Clay

The Connecticut Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Education (DOE) are writing to inform you about a potential asbestos hazard in art clays used in schools. The DPH has learned that some clays sold to schools in Connecticut may have asbestos contamination as a result of "talc" that is added to certain clays.

Talc is added to certain clays as a "flux" to lower the temperature at which the clay needs to be heated. The DPH has become aware that the talc from at least one mine in the Northeast may be contaminated with a type of asbestos called anthophyllite. Although there has been debate if the asbestos found in talc actually falls under the regulatory definition of asbestos, there is enough uncertainty to warrant caution when using clays with added talc. A recent court case in New Jersey found talc mined by the R.T. Vanderbilt Company of New York was responsible for an asbestos-related cancer (mesothelioma) in a pottery shop owner. The pottery shop owner had purchased talc (Nytal 100) in large bags and mixed it in clays he used and sold.

DPH is concerned if such talc is used in Connecticut schools it could cause exposure to airborne asbestos in art rooms. Exposure to airborne asbestos has been linked to disease, most notably an increased risk of lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis. Although most clays are purchased and used in a wet form, and therefore are unlikely to become airborne, pieces that fall off will dry and may create a dust in the room. Additionally, some dried clay pieces may also be sanded or chipped. Presently, there is limited information available regarding exposure to asbestos found in talc used in art clay and the health risk that it may present. Given these facts, the DPH and DOE are advising school officials to inventory all art clays for the potential presence of talc.

The federal government has not made a final determination regarding the need to address the presence of asbestos in art clay. The DPH has asked the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to look into this question, but we do not expect an answer in the short term. In the meantime, the DPH advises you to ask your art material supplier if the clay they sell to your district contains talc. Since there are non-talc alternatives for most art clays, the DPH recommends that you should consider using them until the CPSC arrives at a final conclusion on the nature of asbestos in some talc. Further, the DPH recommends that you conduct a thorough wet wipe cleaning of art rooms or kilns where talc added clays were used. Alternatively, a HEPA vacuuming of the area will also pick up any fibers left behind by past activities.

We will keep you informed of any developments in this area. If you or your staff have any questions, please feel free to call Brian Toal, Supervising Epidemiologist 4, of the DPH, Environmental and Occupational Health Assessment Program at (860) 509-7740.



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