

TO: Bennington State Office Building Stakeholder Team

FROM: Sharon Moffatt, RN, MSN, Commissioner
Vermont Department of Health

THROUGH: Charlie Gingo, Agency of Human Services
Bennington District Field Director

RE: Update on Final Data Received from NIOSH Testing

DATE: May 1, 2008

Background

During the investigation and diagnostic work on the Bennington State Office Building, NIOSH collected a number of samples, specifically from the liquid and sludge in the heat pumps, as well as dust samples from the carpeting. NIOSH then tested these samples for a number of different organisms.

On December 6, 2007, the Vermont Department of Health presented its report on the diagnostic evaluation of the building and findings significant to the health of employees. The complete report and slide presentation — along with the background, reports and updates throughout the investigation — is on our website: HealthVermont.gov, then select Community Public Health.

Our findings and recommendations were based on the combined and substantial evidence resulting from the diagnostic work on the building, NIOSH test results of samples taken from the building, and health findings from employees who worked there. In the report, we noted that final data from NIOSH was still pending (subtypes of the organisms that take longer to grow out, for example), but that this level of detail would not change the conclusions we had reached (re-stated below).

NIOSH Data Update

All of the testing has now been completed and on February 8, 2008 the Health Department received the final environmental sampling data from NIOSH. This includes 20 complex data sets with thousands of pieces of raw data.

NIOSH will not be providing a final report. However, the Health Department will continue to collaborate with NIOSH to analyze these data. We have so far mapped out first priorities for analysis but, because of the amount of the data, and the complexity inherent in the data, the analysis itself is likely to take many months.

Again, although the final data will not change in any way our findings or recommendations, nor does it change any individual's medical treatment, we hope the end result of this analysis will be to better understand the relationship between certain organisms in the environment and human health.

Health Department Findings from Diagnostic Evaluation & Building Evaluation:

- A hidden reservoir of microbial growth was found, along with a method (the building's current HVAC system) to spray these microbes (and the soot) around throughout the building. Evidence that this did happen is the fact that high levels of these microbes were found in the carpeting.
- Three significant microbes were found: thermophilic actinomycetes, mycobacteria and paecilomyces. These microbes are not normally found at such high levels in an indoor, office-type environment.
- These three microbes are associated with the formation of non-caseating granulomas (microscopic lumps) in the body. Sarcoidosis is a disease that is characterized by the formation of non-caseating granulomas. This investigation began because of a higher than expected number of cases of sarcoidosis among people who worked in the building.