



TO: Bennington State Office Building Stakeholder Team

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

Tasha Wallis, Commissioner  
Department of Buildings and General Services

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

RE: Investigation Update

DATE: September 28, 2006

### **Background**

In early June 2006, the Vermont Department of Health together with the Department of Buildings & General Services (BGS), began investigating health concerns among employees of the Bennington State Office Building. The primary health concern was identified as sarcoidosis – a disease characterized by inflammation in one or more organs.

Because sarcoidosis is a serious illness of unknown cause, the investigation has been extensive, including meetings with employees and the Building Stakeholders Team, a health survey of current and past employees, building inspection and environmental testing, employee medical screening tests and review of medical and death records.

All of the information taken together will be used to determine next steps. Depending on the findings, this may include relocation of employees and/or renovation or other remediation of the building. And, although the investigation will be thorough, it is possible we may not find the cause of sarcoidosis cases.

**We continue to advise any employee who has specific health concerns to consult with his or her own health care provider.**

### **Update**

Department of Buildings & General Services Commissioner Tasha Wallis will attend the September 28 Bennington Stakeholder Team meeting to answer questions and outline steps being taken by BGS to prepare for any action that may be needed as a result of the investigation.

The following update and other detailed information on the investigation as it progresses is always available on the Health Department's website: *healthvermont.gov*, then select *Community Public Health*.

### **Environmental Testing Results - Drinking Water**

Drinking water samples from taps on each of the three floors in the building were taken by the Health Department on Sept. 11 to test for an array of inorganic chemicals and volatile organic compounds at the Health Department Laboratory. The tests were conducted to determine if the pipes that run the Bennington water supply into the building are contaminating drinking water.

Testing for the full array of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) – 58 different compounds that evaporate or “off-gas” at room temperature – is now complete and the results are given below. Testing for inorganic chemicals is still underway.

The only VOCs detected in testing were chloroform and bromodichloromethane, well within the Maximum Contaminant Level set by EPA's Safe Drinking Water Standard. These are both expected byproducts of chlorination used to disinfect drinking water, and their presence reflects Bennington's chlorinated water supply.

1. District Court Kitchenette  
Chlorination byproducts found: chloroform at 56 ppb and bromodichloromethane at 1.6 ppb
2. State's Attorney Kitchenette  
Chlorination byproducts found: chloroform at 58 ppb and bromodichloromethane at 1.7 ppb
3. Family Court Kitchenette  
Chlorination byproducts found: chloroform at 58 ppb and bromodichloromethane at 1.7 ppb

### **Employee Medical Screening**

The medical screening tests offered by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) were completed Sept. 27. A total of 102 people participated in the testing. NIOSH will send to each participant his or her own test results by about Oct. 20. The Health Department has alerted health care providers in the Bennington area about the investigation and the employee medical screening tests – and informed them that we are encouraging employees who participate in the testing to share their results with their health care provider.

### **Health Survey – Current Employees**

Results from the health survey of current employees will be ready in time for the October 5 update.

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### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

Following are the questions raised at the Sept. 21 Building Stakeholders Team meeting

with answers compiled by the Department of Health, Agency of Human Services and the Department of Buildings & General Services (BGS).

### **Medical Screening Tests**

**Q:** Will the NIOSH team be testing only current building employees? What about former building employees?

**A:** The NIOSH medical screening tests were completed this week. Only current employees and contractors who work more than 20 hours per week in the building were eligible for testing. The group of Health Department employees who worked more than 20 hours per week in the building until their recent move, and who wanted to participate, were also included in the NIOSH testing.

**Q:** Will individual employees who participated in the NIOSH medical screening receive an interpretation along with their test results?

**A:** Yes. NIOSH has extensive experience in conducting these tests and assures us that they will be providing information that is easy for individuals to understand.

### **Building Maintenance**

**Q:** Has a decision been made by BGS to postpone the cluster fly spraying of the building?

**A:** Cluster fly spraying has been postponed and will not be rescheduled until a decision is made about relocation, renovation or other remediation to the building.

**Q:** During the summer we learned how warm the indoor temps need to be before air conditioning is turned on. In the cooler months, how low does the temperature in the building need to go before the heat is turned on?

**A:** Boilers in the building are on now. Indoor temperatures should be between 68 and 72 degrees. During the transition from cooling season to heating season, BGS maintenance staff often spend considerable time working to adjust temperatures in hot and cold spots within the building.

### **Other**

**Q:** Is BGS doing an active survey of available properties in the area should the need arise to move employees?

**A:** Yes. For the last month BGS has been searching the Bennington commercial office space listings and we are now arranging site visits to get a better feel for what is available in the area, and which offices could fit which space. Bill Laferriere of BGS will be in Bennington on Sept. 28 to meet with managers to review current space needs. BGS is actively planning for any contingency and is working closely with the public health experts at the Health Department, who will advise on how to proceed.

**Q:** If employees do need to be moved, how quickly will it take place?

**A:** How quickly employees could be moved if this becomes necessary will depend upon our ability to locate appropriate workspace(s), whether the workspace(s) needs work before it can be occupied, fit up requirements for telephones, computers, furnishings, equipment, landlord/tenant lease processing, etc. BGS cannot yet to estimate how much time this could take.

**Q:** Is Risk Management willing to step forward and pay insurance co-pays for employees and former employees who are going to their physicians to have their health screenings interpreted? (NOTE: Only current employees who work more than 20 hours per week and those Health Department employees who recently moved from the building were eligible for the NIOSH health screening.)

**A:** BGS is reviewing this issue with the Department of Human Resources.