



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: November 2, 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.

On Oct. 5, the Vermont Department of Health presented detailed findings from *The Interim Report on the Investigation into Health Concerns Among Occupants of the Bennington State Office Building*. The health survey of current employees found higher than expected rates of sarcoidosis, asthma and asthma-like symptoms. A visual inspection of the building found evidence of past water damage, and environmental sampling in the building found evidence of fungi and endotoxin (bacteria).

Although no conclusive evidence has been found to link health concerns with the building itself, the Health Department recommended further diagnostic work and likely renovation of the building – and relocation of employees while this is being done.

The investigation continues. However, it is possible that the cause of sarcoidosis cases will not be found. We continue to advise any employee who has specific health concerns to consult with his or her own health care provider.

UPDATE

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*.

Relocation Planning

The Department of Buildings & General Services is working very hard to move employees as quickly as possible so that building diagnostics and renovation can occur. Unfortunately, there have been difficulties related to a number of relocation options.

As of this week, BGS has made a great deal of progress. They have applied for and received permits from the Bennington Zoning Board to place modular temporary offices at the site of the state office building. Site work has begun and parts of the first unit have been delivered. Additional modular units will continue to arrive during the next week or two, and will be stored at a staging area until the site is ready and assembly can begin.

BGS will continue to provide ongoing updates about the status of the modular units and relocation planning through Charlie Gingo.

Health Survey – Former Employees

Surveys are still coming in to the Health Department. However, to date we have received 110 surveys from 307 eligible employees, for a response rate of 36 percent.

Community Health Assessment

The four major private insurance companies (Cigna, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, MVP, and CBA) along with Medicaid have provided their sarcoidosis claim data for 2001-2005. These companies cover approximately 68 percent of insured Vermonters.

Data analysts at the Health Department are working to develop a database of unduplicated records. Once that work is complete, they will compare the total number of people with a sarcoidosis diagnosis by county to try to determine whether Bennington County has a higher rate than other counties and the state as a whole. They also hope to be able to use this data to compare Vermont and national sarcoidosis rates.

Once this analysis is complete, results will be shared with the Stakeholders Team.

NIOSH Employee Medical Screening Results

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has mailed individual test results to each of the 102 participants in the medical screening tests offered in September. State Epidemiologist Dr. Cort Lohff will attend the November 2 Building Stakeholders Team meeting to speak and answer questions about the medical tests and what steps individuals might take, depending on their own results.

On November 1, the Health Department received the aggregate results from NIOSH. Their next step is to correlate the aggregate results with the employee health survey in order to analyze the data. They expect to complete their preliminary analysis next week.

and will update employees on November 10.

Reimbursement for Costs Related to NIOSH Screening

According to the agreement worked out between the Department of Human Resources and VSEA, any state employee who participated in the NIOSH screening is eligible to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket medical costs related to the screening. Details and forms are available at: http://healthvermont.gov/local/Bennington_building.aspx