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Asbestos level closes top floor of UM's Science Complex

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NEWS RELEASE

June 10, 2005

Contact: Hugh Jesse or Tom Javins, Facilities Services, 243-6131.

ASBESTOS LEVEL CLOSES TOP FLOOR OF UM'S SCIENCE COMPLEX

MISSOULA –

University of Montana officials sealed off the top floor of a campus building Friday after recent testing revealed an unacceptable level of asbestos in dust that had settled in a research professor's office.

Workers on the fourth floor of the Science Complex were sent home Friday morning as a precaution, and a licensed asbestos abatement contractor was brought in to clean up the contaminated dust, said Tom Javins, assistant director for maintenance in UM's Facilities Services.

"No air samples have indicated any risk," Javins said, "but we have this dust sample that indicates an unacceptable level in the surface dust in at least one location. We're sampling further to determine the extent."

UM officials said test results probably won't be back until next Wednesday. "Then we will analyze the data and choose a course of action," said Hugh Jesse, director of Facilities Services. "Until the test results are complete and appropriate cleanup has been accomplished, we are taking precautionary measures."

The building's fourth floor houses offices and laboratories for the College of Forestry and Conservation and the Department of Chemistry. A research professor on the floor had been away

for about a month when co-workers opened his office and noticed an unusual amount of dust and debris on surfaces, Javins said.

“They had a concern about the dust and what it looked like because it has been known there are materials containing asbestos in the building,” he said.

The Science Complex was built in the early 1970s when it was common to use materials containing asbestos, including fireproofing on building steel, ceiling and floor tile, and mudded pipe-fitting insulation. The Montana Legislature this year allocated \$500,000 to UM to begin asbestos abatement in the building.

Javins said the contaminated dust in the fourth-floor office suite most likely came from fireproofing on the building’s steel.

He said UM has been monitoring the air in the building since the early 1980s and has never had a reading that exceeded the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s permissible exposure levels. In the last couple of years, samples have been taken monthly.

Besides sealing off the fourth floor, officials posted asbestos information near the first-floor entrance. Asbestos abatement workers will be in the building over the weekend to clean up and make sure no one enters the fourth floor.

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