Dear Editor,

Overwhelming public resistance to the Sheep Creek mine at the head of the Bitterroot River just got a boost in the form of a comment letter submitted to the USFS by the Environmental Protection Agency. In the interest of safeguarding human health the EPA is requesting, “Prior to blasting, drilling, large-scale aerial transport of sampling materials, reuse of waste rock, or other activities that may expose workers or the public to nuisance dust, the EPA recommends sampling for asbestiform materials through EPA Method 600.”

It is a great relief to have the issue of this potentially lethal threat from asbestos validated by the EPA.

Their request is based on the fact that, “It has been well-established that asbestos is present in Libby and Troy, Montana near the project area. The minerology of Sheep Creek is similar to these sites.” Their concern grows from the context of over 400 people killed by asbestos from a mine in Libby.

The letter goes on to say: “Characterizing the presence or absence of asbestiform fibers in the area of interest would help inform the potential for health effects from public and worker asbestos exposure, the need for appropriate asbestos mitigation strategies, and possible remediation.”

The request specifies that analysis be done “prior to” any work that would create dust, recognizing there is no way to recover toxic dust when it enters lungs or the environment. Early testing could prevent workers and the public from being used by the mining company as canaries in their mine.

It is important to recognize that sampling is only the first step in a human health risk analysis and that the FS might not require even that first step in their upcoming permit decision.

Support asbestos sampling and a complete independent health risk analysis by sending comments to: Sheep.Creek.Comments@usda.gov

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