

## Mesothelioma screenings to start in spring

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Health screenings for Northeastern Minnesota miners and their spouses who might have been exposed to asbestos fibers will begin this spring as part of a five-year study into what has caused a high level of rare lung cancer among mine workers.

Researchers from the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota will talk about progress in the five-year, \$4.9 million study into mesothelioma cases tonight at the Mountain Iron Community Center.

Tamara Diedrich from the Natural Resources Research Institute in Duluth will speak about the geological aspect of the project.

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Dr. Jeffrey Mandel, an occupational physician at the university, said researchers hope to complete a random, voluntary screening of about 2,000 people at the Virginia Regional Medical Center within a six- to nine-month period.

There have been 59 identified cases of the rare cancer among a group of Iron Range miners. Study participants worked in Iron Range mines between the 1930s and 1982. The disease can appear 40 to 50 years after someone is exposed to asbestos and is fatal.

Researchers are trying to determine whether there is a relationship between exposure to taconite dust and mesothelioma.

Seventeen miners were known to have developed mesothelioma between 1988 and 1996, and in 2007 then-Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Dianne Mandernach was widely criticized for not releasing information about 35 additional known cases.

Officials began calling for an investigation into the mesothelioma cases soon afterward.

The Minnesota Legislature approved the \$4.9 million study in April. The five-year study is supposed to find not only what caused the cancer cases, but also ways to avoid the problem in the future.

Those who have been selected for the random screening should be notified sometime in the next several months, Mandel said. The screening process would include a physical heart and lung exam, a chest X-ray, breathing tests and a blood test, he said.

Researchers have been busy collecting background information on workers' job history and exposure to asbestos, and scientists from the Natural Resources Research Institute in Duluth have been collecting and analyzing air samples from locations across the Iron Range.

### IF YOU GO

**What:** University of Minnesota update on five-year mesothelioma study  
**When:** 6:30 p.m. today  
**Where:** Mountain Iron Community Center, 8586 Enterprise Drive  
**Details:** Presentation scheduled to last one hour, plus time for public questions

