

U of M updates mesothelioma study

Studies investigate cancer on the Iron Range

MOUNTAIN IRON, Minn. (AP) — Experts studying cancer rates among Iron Range miners say they're making progress on a number of related studies.

Researchers from the University of Minnesota gave an update here Thursday evening on their five-year study into mesothelioma on the Iron Range, which started in summer 2007.

They said a major new study being developed for 2009 will be the respiratory health assessment of 1,200 active and retired miners and 800 spouses or partners randomly selected.

"We need to obtain a scientifically based sample in a meaningful way," said Ian Greaves, a medical doctor and professor with the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health, who is leading the study.

Those participating will be given a questionnaire to fill out. Physical testing will be conducted at the Virginia Regional Medical Center, with lung functions, chest X-rays, breath tests for measurement of lung scarring, and blood tests.

The testing is expected to

start this spring and run for six to nine months. It will be funded from the \$4.9 million allocated by the Minnesota Legislature for the overall five-year study.

Researchers with the Minnesota Taconite Workers Lung Health Partnership are trying to determine if there is a relationship between taconite dust and mesothelioma, which is typically associated with exposure to asbestos, and investigate any connections in the 58 deaths from mesothelioma among Range mine workers between mining dust and cancer or other diseases.

The task force has started gathering data on exposures of workers in the mines, dust composition also will be looked at, said Dr. Jeffrey Mandel, a study leader. The task force also has worked out agreements with all taconite producers on the Range, and that "allows us to work collaboratively with the mining industry," Mandel said.

Four health studies will be ongoing: a mortality study that will examine data from the Minnesota Department of Health on miners and causes

of death; a cancer rate of incidence study; a respiratory health assessment of miners or retirees; and an occupational exposure study. All will be conducted by the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health in the Twin Cities.

Two environmental studies, including study of sediments in lake bottoms, will be conducted by the Natural Resources and Research Institute the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Don Fosnacht of NRRI said particulate samplers are scattered across the Range to measure exposure to airborne particles. He said the data gathering process has been taking advantage of the shutdown at Keewatin Taconite to obtain a base sampling of conditions without the plant operating.

Dean John Finnegan Jr. of the U of M School of Public Health said the task force has some of the best scientific experts from around the country on board.

"It's going to be the best effort to this point," he said.

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— DEAN JOHN FINNEGAN, JR,
University of Minnesota School of Public Health

Printing imperfections present during scanning

