Libby Asbestos Response Plan (LARP)

Agency Coordination and Asbestos Air Monitoring During Wildfire Event in OU3

Libby NPL Site Map
What is the Issue at OU3?

- Asbestos contamination in soil, bark, duff, surface water, ash
  - Forest contamination from mill operations until 1990
- Mine site (1100 acres) + 10,000 acres heavily contaminated forest
- Risk drivers for cleanup
- Dust generating activities = highest exposure
- > 95% of asbestos remains in ash after burning, <5% in air
- No fuels management in OU3 forest due to asbestos since early 2000’s = heavy fuels load
- Significant political/media interest and community risk perception

What is the purpose of the LARP? What is the scope?

- **Purpose:**
  - Establishes roles and responsibilities for:
    - Inter-agency coordination and communication during a wildfire event
    - Tactical response
    - Risk communication to public
- **Scope:**
  - Fire located near or within Operable Unit 3 (WR Grace mine site)
  - Does not include coordination for other non-fire related emergency response work
Coordination and Communication

- EPA, USFS, DNRC, MDEQ, County, WR Grace (PRP)

Roles/responsibilities before/during/after response – ICS
- USFS IC or UC with County/DNRC/EPA depending on complexity
- EPA role = sample analysis, data interpretation, assist with asbestos risk messaging
- County role = public health decision making, stand up JIC, emergency services (sheriff, hospital, shelters, etc)
- DNRC role = land owner, assist with firefighting operations
- MDEQ role = downwind county communication/sampling, liaison with state disaster/emergency services
- WR Grace = activity based sampling, member of JIC, post fire monitoring, liable for costs incurred by USFS/EPA in response

How will decisions be made and by whom?
- Tactical operations – USFS/DNRC
- Evac/shelter in place – County
- Messaging - JIC

Risk Communication

- Monitoring asbestos in ambient air and personal air (firefighters)
  - 72 hours turnaround time for TEM analytical results
- Analysis and interpretation of data for public health decision making
  - What is acceptable/unacceptable risk?
  - Asbestos vs PM as driver for public health concerns
- JIC
  - Communication of asbestos levels in smoke/ash and associated risk
  - Media/political response coordination
  - Coordination with downwind counties/Canada
Highway 37 Fire

- LARP response overview and lessons learned

Hwy 37 fire

- Started on July 19, 2018 – discarded cigarette
- Located along Hwy 37 right-of-way near powerline and within USFS modified fire response zone
- Adjacent to Kootenai River
- Moving uphill toward OU3 rapidly in steep terrain; access difficult
- USFS firefighters required to wear PAPRs – 10 dedicated crew members
- USFS has little experience with decon
- Smoke visible in Libby
Hwy 37 LARP Response

➢ USFS initial attack utilizing heavy aerial support and dedicated ground crew
   • USFS manage fire suppression information sharing via USFS Kootenai NF website and Inciweb
➢ LARP response initiated with coordination call on 7/19 – all agencies and Grace
➢ Decision made to delay ambient air monitoring until fire threatened to move into OU3
➢ Virtual JIC formed on 9/20 to manage asbestos/public health related inquiries
   • Led by Lincoln County PIO
   • EPA/State/USFS PIOs integrated
   • Initial pre-developed messages released to public via County EMA FB and twitter accounts
   • Response to Media inquiries coordinated

Hwy 37 LARP Response Cont.

➢ EPA coordinate with WR Grace to prep for ABS monitoring
➢ EPA coordinate with Lincoln County Asbestos Resource Program to prep for ambient air monitoring
➢ EPA assist with decon set-up and access to OU3
➢ EPA residential/commercial cleanups stand down 9/19-9/21 due to inability to access mine site for soil disposal
➢ EPA resumed residential/commercial cleanup on 9/22 by taking soil to landfill
➢ EPA assist USFS will educating fire crews on asbestos risk and advising on appropriate decon procedures
Hwy 37 fire lessons learned

➢ Tactical:
  • USFS not well-versed in decontamination procedures, need additional training, personnel, and ‘test drive’ decon equipment before use
  • Decon is significant resource drain for USFS, need to balance with IA needs in event new fire starts
  • Aerial support critical to successful suppression due to access limitations and PPE restrictions for ground crews
  • Early and frequent education of crews on risks from asbestos and clarify need for PPE

➢ Coordination:
  • JIC coordination performed well – County lead
  • Good relationship developed with local reporters – correct information disseminated
  • Good coordination between Lincoln County and downwind Flathead County
  • Need additional messaging on ‘double boundary’ to public
  • Public pushback on not sampling for asbestos – perception vs reality

Questions?