

LINDENHURST: State board delays hospital decision. **PAGE 5**



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LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2007 • NEWSSUNONLINE.COM

WEATHER FORECAST

HIGH 83°
LOW 65°

Today's forecast drawing is by Savanna Gonzalez, first-grader at B.J. Hooper School in Lindenhurst.



POISON BEACH

LEVELS OF THE WASTE THAT PLAGUES ILLINOIS BEACH STATE PARK MAY BE WORSE THAN EVER.

REPORT ON PAGE 4

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Trouble on the beach: Do not disturb

Federal CDC detects most toxic form of asbestos in the sand — and air — in tests at most-visited state park

By Carol Marin and Don Moseley
SUN-TIMES / NBC5

On a warm day in July, Sara Anderson took her boys, ages 11 and 8, from their home in Richmond to play at Illinois Beach State Park, the same beach she'd gone to as a child.

Not far from the towel they spread on the sand: a piece of washed-up debris that was a stark reminder of a problem that's marred the park for more than 10 years. Asbestos.

Nearly a decade ago, the Chicago Sun-Times exposed asbestos pollution at the park near Zion. Now, according to a letter from a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official, "significantly elevated" levels of the most-toxic form of the known carcinogen have been found there.

The beach remains safe, federal and state authorities said in interviews. But an April 24, 2007, letter from an EPA official to a federal health official in Chicago raises concerns. In the letter, Brad Bradley, a U.S. EPA project manager, cites "concerns regarding the safety of human use of the beaches."

His letter came in response to tests last August by an arm of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry used grading equipment on the beach so it could measure asbestos fibers churned up from the sand into the air. It found the most-toxic form of asbestos fibers — amphibole asbestos.

The mere presence of asbestos in sand or soil isn't considered a human health hazard. The danger is if pieces are broken and asbestos particles get into the air: Asbestos can be deadly if inhaled, leading to a form of cancer.

"It is my understanding that we have found some amphibole asbestos in some of the air samples,"



NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

The Camp Logan area of Illinois Beach State Park is cleared of asbestos in this photo from March 2006. In August last year, an arm of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used grading equipment on the beach at the state park to measure asbestos fibers churned up from the sand into the air. It found the most toxic form of asbestos fibers — amphibole asbestos.

ABOUT THE PARK

Illinois Beach State Park, outside Zion, is the state's most visited park.

- 4,160 acres
- 6.5 miles of Lake Michigan beachfront
- 2 million to 3 million visitors a year

SOURCE: ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Richard Karl, Superfund director for the EPA's regional office in Chicago, acknowledged in an interview.

Illinois Beach State Park is the state's most visited park. The presence of asbestos there is hardly a secret. Visitors are met with signs warning of asbestos-containing materials that have washed up and scattered along the beach.

But it's what's not visible — as-

bestos fibers embedded in the sand — that worries Jeff Camplin. In 2003, Camplin, who runs an asbestos-consulting firm, authored a report for the Illinois Dunesland Preservation Society.

"When you do disturb this sand, measurable, dangerous levels of toxic amphiboles are in the air," Camplin said in an interview. "If it was my choice, I would have the park shut down."

Paul Kakuris, president of the Illinois Dunesland Preservation Society, doesn't go that far.

"We're not saying: Shut the park down," Kakuris said. "We are saying: Shut the beaches."

Asbestos at the park may come from a number of sources, according to federal and state authorities. Among them: the old Johns Manville plant, formerly at the south end of the park, which, from the 1920s until 1985, manufactured products containing asbestos, including roofing materials. It's now

a fenced-off EPA Superfund site. Other potential sources include demolished homes along the beach that were built with asbestos products and polluted sand dredged from the lake.

In studies in 1998, 2000 and last year, the state found small amounts of asbestos and concluded there was "minimal health risk."

"I think it's fine," said Dr. Rosemary Sokas, an occupational physician and professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago who was part of a team of experts that did the state's 2006 study.

But in declaring the park safe, the government has relied on a test viewed by critics as outdated and is in the process of being revamped, the U.S. EPA acknowledged.

"The science associated with asbestos and the risk associated with (outdoor exposure to) asbestos isn't at the level we would like to see it," the EPA's Karl said.

The testing that led to the latest

safety concerns was done last August by the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Its report said, in part: "Based on the bulk analysis of sand samples collected, the sand in (and) of itself does not appear to pose a significant source of asbestos fibers."

The EPA's Bradley responded, "There might be a problem with this statement," noting, "air samples near the beach-grading equipment were significantly elevated."

"These inconsistencies in the actual air-monitoring results raise concerns regarding the safety of human use of the beaches," Bradley wrote.

Federal authorities have a review panel studying the test results.

For now, Sara Anderson, the Richmond mom, is aware of the asbestos concerns but not overly worried: "I'm making sure the kids are taking showers when they get home."