



## **Press Release**

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### **Neighbors to attend W.R. Grace Meeting on Asbestos Contamination**

W. R. Grace & Co., one of the world's largest chemical companies, is applying to end state oversight of the clean-up of its contaminated North Cambridge property. They will hold a public meeting on Thursday, December 16, to present their "closure strategy." Neighborhood groups are encouraging residents to attend and demand long-term protection from asbestos fibers.

The Alewife Study Group – concerned neighborhood residents – based on data collected by W. R. Grace, estimates that there are 600,000 pounds of asbestos buried in the soil on the site. In 2001, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded that tests "indicated that there were significant amounts of asbestos below the surface," but it "does not pose an immediate health hazard as long as the waste remains buried." Many North Cambridge residents are concerned because there are not enough safeguards in place to keep the asbestos from being exposed if the site is developed. Asbestos has been shown to cause two types of cancer, along with other diseases.

Environmental consultants for W. R. Grace are proposing that development can occur if a plan is established for controlling asbestos, dust, and odors. There are currently no specific state or federal requirements for handling asbestos-contaminated soil. Many neighbors, as well as users of the adjacent Russell Field football, soccer and baseball fields or the MDC pool, may not realize the extent of the contamination and the potential hazards if asbestos is blown into the area during construction. A Risk Characterization study, released by Cambridge Environmental, Inc., on November 24, indicated that under current conditions there is no significant risk but if a large-scale construction process is undertaken as planned, it could raise the risk level 20 times the state guidelines for residents living near the site.

"We need continued government oversight to ensure asbestos fibers will not become airborne during future construction," said Ronnie Millar, a Jackson Street resident who lives with his wife and two young children just two blocks from the site.

W. R. Grace had plans to develop the site into office buildings and a hotel, but withdrew them just before filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection under the weight of asbestos lawsuits. A recent statement from W. R. Grace indicated that the company and several current and former executives may soon face grand jury indictments for possible criminal behavior related to asbestos.

**Grace Meeting on Asbestos Contamination, continued . . .**

## **W. R. Grace Meeting . . . continued**

The Alewife Study Group contends that the best solution is to leave the asbestos buried in the soil undisturbed. W. R. Grace intends to maintain protection with a deed restriction specifying uses of the property that will be allowed or not allowed, and through the requirement of a plan to contain asbestos, dust and odors. "The plan shall be developed by a Certified Industrial Hygienist or similarly knowledgeable and trained professional," according to the draft Activity and Use Limitation document submitted by consultants for W. R. Grace.

"The development process will not require someone certified by the state to oversee the clean-up of contaminated waste, as would be required if they developed the site now, under state watch," says Mike Nakagawa, who lives close to the W. R. Grace property and is a board member of the community nonprofit group, Alewife Neighbors, Inc. "Who will make sure the operator of the bulldozer follows the plan and doesn't create dust – contaminated dust – that can blow into the neighborhood, without the neighbors or the state having access to their private property to watch?"

After the last public meeting in June 1999, there was much concern over the way the site was being managed by the environmental consultants hired by W. R. Grace as part of the privatized state waste clean-up process. As a result of discussions that followed the meeting, the City of Cambridge instituted an ordinance to specify conditions for handling asbestos in soil, the first such regulation in the country. Residents are concerned that the ordinance may undergo changes when W. R. Grace informs the City of its intent to develop the site, and are pushing for specific state requirements for the site in writing.

The public meeting will be held at 7:00 PM, December 16, at the W. R. Grace employee cafeteria, 62 Whittemore Avenue. Public comments will be taken until December 30. More information can be found at the websites of the neighborhood groups, [www.alewife.org](http://www.alewife.org) and [www.alewifeneighbors.org](http://www.alewifeneighbors.org).