

Health and Safety

Update on the Potential Health Hazards of Vermiculite

The July 2000 issue of Forest Nursery Notes contained an article on the potential hazards of handling vermiculite. In August, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the findings of a study they conducted on vermiculite products that they obtained from garden stores across the country. The survey found that "only 15% (8 products out of 54 sampled) of these products contained enough asbestos to allow EPA to reliably quantify a percentage of asbestos in the product ...further analysis of the likelihood of the asbestos becoming airborne, during routine use of these products, indicated that *this potential exposure poses a minimal health risk to consumers.*" The low levels of asbestos were found primarily in those bags containing straight vermiculite.

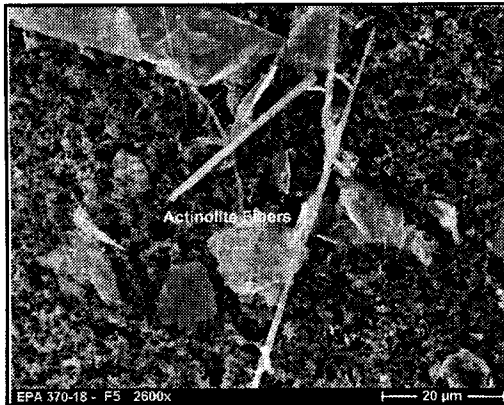
The EPA recommends that consumers

- ?? Use vermiculite outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.
- ?? Keep it damp during use
- ?? Avoid bringing vermiculite home on clothing
- ?? Use premixed potting soil which has less vermiculite and more moisture
- ?? Mix it with additives such as peat, sawdust, perlite or bark.

The risks associated with occupational exposures to vermiculite were not addressed in this report and according to EPA officials we contacted, follow-up work in this area is not expected at this time. We were advised that when employees are working around vermiculite or vermiculite products where dust can be seen in the air, they avoid potential inhalation through the use of respiratory protection equipment.

The *Sampling and Analysis of Consumer Garden Products that Contain Vermiculite* report is posted on the EPA's Asbestos website at:

<http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/asbestos/vermiculite.pdf> Other information on vermiculite and asbestos can be found at www.epa.gov/asbestos.



Courtesy EPA Region 10