

# Asbestos hazard?

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According to a report by Dwan and Associates, a local asbestos safety company contracted by Cabrillo College after the earthquake last October, "The school should remove all ceilings which contain asbestos." But, funding shortages may prove to be prohibitive.

"It's a monumental project to remove all the asbestos ceilings...the logistics are astronomical," said Vice-President, for Business John Roberts. "We ought to mitigate that hazard (ceilings, floors, and pipe insulation containing asbestos on campus)," "(but) it is beyond the capabilities of our funding."

Cabrillo has applied for financial assistance from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), claiming the Oct. 17 earthquake has necessitated funding for asbestos removal, Roberts is currently appealing the amount of FEMA money allotted. He added that appeals are part of the process of applying for FEMA monies.

However, according to Cabrillo's Hazardous Materials Specialist, Nancy Alstrum, there never was an asbestos health hazard.

Alstrum said tests performed after the asbestos clean-up, which was performed soon after the Oct. 17 earthquake, showed that levels of asbestos were well within "permissible exposure levels established by the Environmental Protection Agency and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Agency)."

The most recent air sampling, taken on Jan. 4 in room 806B, showed a reading of .0003 fibres per cubic centimeter.

"The regulation that applies to us here is OSHA," said Alstrum. "OSHA says a permissible exposure level is 0.2."

As Hazardous Materials Specialist, a part-time position, Alstrum is responsible for looking at environmental regulations and

how they apply to Cabrillo, and how the school adheres to them. She also makes recommendations for compliance.

"We don't believe there was any asbestos health danger before the earthquake," she said.

No air samples were taken before the asbestos/earthquake clean-up last October.

Campus Police Chief, John Barker, who oversees the health and public safety departments on campus, said, after the earthquake, "I'm personally comforted that there was low level exposure [to asbestos]."

New studies have questioned the health dangers of asbestos.

In the January 8 issue of *Forbes*, Dr. Bernard Gee, professor of medicine at Yale said, "The basis for this fear [of exposure to asbestos] is unreal, not founded to reality, a gross overreaction that's high in emotional content."

According to the report, Gee recently wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that "there is no evidence that environmental exposure to asbestos is a public health hazard. Asbestos is all around us; in the air, in the water, everywhere. It's a naturally occurring mineral."

"There would seem to be little risk from environmental asbestos." Environmental exposure is the everyday exposure to materials containing asbestos.

"It's what brake linings are made out of, though that is being faded out. Every time a car or truck hits the brakes, asbestos fibers are released in the air." Gee wrote "With all these deadly fibers floating around, you'd expect a rise in asbestos-related diseases among the general public. Yet asbestosis (lung disease caused by asbestos fibers) affects only asbestos workers."

"Frankly, I don't know what to say about that. It's interesting and informative," said Roberts. But until regulators change the regulations, Cabrillo must follow the established State and Federal guidelines which they must follow now.