

April 5, 2017

Dear Faculty, Staff and Students,

I am writing to update you on our findings related to three instances where asbestos was found in dust samples taken from labs at the Medical Sciences Building and the actions we are taking to guard against reoccurrences as we continue lab upgrades.

I appreciate that the last few weeks have been an upsetting and disruptive time for some of you. The health and safety of our students, faculty and staff is our top priority – and it's one we take very seriously. Many of our staff have worked around the clock to understand what caused the incidents and to develop additional safeguards and plans to better inform you about construction work. Only by understanding how the construction dust arrived in the labs can we ensure it doesn't happen again.

### **The Facts:**

- There have been three localized instances of asbestos in research labs. No classes or public spaces were affected.
- All spaces were closed, tested, thoroughly cleaned and retested.
- Asbestos is a naturally occurring substance. It is most hazardous when airborne and if it is inhaled in high quantities over long periods of time. This is not the situation now at the Medical Sciences Building nor has it ever been at U of T.
- More than 330 air samples taken throughout the building to date since March 10 have been tested and all have been below the occupational exposure limit for asbestos.
- A [report](#) from a third party has found MSB safe for general occupancy based on those air samples. It found the building's heating, cooling and ventilations systems free of airborne fibres from construction.
- The [Ministry of Labour](#) has conducted three site visits and has not issued any orders or given direction to take further actions other than those we already had in place.

### **What We Know**

The seal on the plastic enclosures required when asbestos-containing materials are removed failed on two construction sites where work was being undertaken by a contractor at MSB.

- In one instance, dust from a site on the sixth floor (rooms 6368/6366) was found in labs on the sixth and seventh floor on January 31 after making its way to the seventh floor through a vertical shaft that connects building services between floors, and to the

adjacent sixth floor lab through gaps at the top of the wall shared by the lab and the construction site. The labs were closed, tested, thoroughly cleaned and retested before occupants were allowed to return. On March 16, more dust was found in one of the affected labs on the sixth floor. Our investigation suggests this was dust that remained in gaps at the top of the wall shared by the lab and the construction site. We have cleaned and sealed the opening at the top of the wall and all gaps.

- In the second instance, similar dust was reported on February 24 in a sixth floor lab in a different area of the building, under a door that led to a shaft that houses pipes and wires running between the third and seventh floors. This vertical shaft is adjacent to both an abatement site and this sixth floor lab. The lab was closed, tested, thoroughly cleaned and retested. Dust appeared again under the door on March 7. We've concluded the difference in air pressure between the vertical access shaft and lab caused air from the shaft to vent into the lab through the improperly sealed door. We've responded by sealing all shaft doors and rebalancing the air pressure in the shaft. We have also tested, and will continue to test, the air quality in the shaft to ensure that the air in this and other shafts remains safe for all building users. It is important to note that service shafts are not connected to the building's central ventilation system.
- In the third instance, on March 18, dust was found with traces of asbestos fibres below a hole drilled in a wall in a room adjoining a third floor lab. Our investigation shows this is not related to the abatement activity and is linked to a sealer used underneath the paint on the wall. This dates back to the original construction of the building. As a result of this discovery, we are implementing new procedures for drilling or demolishing walls in MSB. With this new information, we have initiated a survey of the building, and this will be added to the University's asbestos inventory.

### **Going Forward**

As a result of our findings we are implementing new measures as we continue with work at MSB.

- The contractor involved in the previous asbestos removal has been removed from the project and will not be given further work on campus.
- We will increase site inspections and conduct random tests on abatement sites to ensure that enclosures are properly sealed so that no dust can get out.
- On all construction sites, including those not involved in abatement, we will take additional measures to reduce the spread of dust through common walls, and service shafts.
- We will send out regular communications of upcoming project plans including timing and location, as well as their progress.

I appreciate this experience has been frustrating but we wish to proceed with caution and care, taking our community's concerns into account. We will continue to conduct tests throughout MSB and report the results through [Portal](#) (information about accessing those reports is provided below). Should you have any continued concerns, please contact Environmental Health & Safety at [ehs.office@utoronto.ca](mailto:ehs.office@utoronto.ca).

Kind regards,

Scott Mabury  
Vice-President, University Operations

### ***Accessing MSB Test Reports***

*All reports related to ongoing asbestos and air quality testing in MSB are being posted by the University's Environmental Health & Safety office. Access is available by emailing your UTORID to [ehs.office@utoronto.ca](mailto:ehs.office@utoronto.ca), with "Access request re: MSB reports portal" in the subject line; access will automatically be available to you in one business day. The results also are reported to the MSB Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) and will be posted on their safety board. The JHSC will continue to be engaged throughout this process. Reports will also be provided to union leadership in accordance with the applicable collective agreements.*