



TO: Bennington State Office Building Stakeholder Team

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RE: Investigation Update

DATE: September 14, 2006

### **Background**

In early June 2006, the Vermont Department of Health initiated an investigation of health concerns among employees of the Bennington State Office Building. The primary health concern was identified as sarcoidosis – a disease characterized by inflammation in one or more organs.

Because sarcoidosis is a serious illness of unknown cause, the Health Department and the Department of Buildings & General Services have undertaken an extensive investigation including health surveys, building inspection, environmental testing, medical screening tests and review of medical and death records. Although the investigation will be thorough, it is possible we may not ultimately find the cause of sarcoidosis cases.

The following provides important updates on the ongoing investigation and answers to questions raised at the September 7 meeting of the Building Stakeholders Team.

### **Employee Medical Screening - Weeks of September 18 and September 25**

Health Department investigators, in collaboration with National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) expert technicians, are making specialized medical screening tests available on site during the weeks of September 18 and September 25 for all current employees who work more than 20 hours per week in the building. In addition, Health Department employees who recently moved out of the building are eligible for this testing. These tests are voluntary and are offered at no charge to employees. Detailed information on the tests was provided to employees on September 13.

### **Health Survey - Former Employees**

Health Department investigators developed a health questionnaire similar to the one used to survey current employees in the Bennington State Office Building. This will be mailed to former employees beginning September 15. Respondents are asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the Health Department within two weeks. Former employees to receive this questionnaire include those who worked in the building as far back as 1994.

### **Environmental Re-testing – September 9 - 15**

Due to failure of some of the contractor's equipment used to perform environmental sampling, ATC Associates, Inc. had to repeat sampling for carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, relative humidity, temperature and particulate matter in some locations. These sites included the District Court, the State's Attorneys Office and the Department of Corrections. This repeat sampling started September 9 and will continue through September 15.

### **For More Information**

We will keep you updated with new information as this investigation continues. Meanwhile, if you or others in the building have questions, please continue to bring them to the Building Stakeholders Team. We will do our best to answer your questions as quickly as possible.

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### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

Following are the questions raised at the September 7 Building Stakeholders Team meeting with answers compiled by the Department of Health, Agency of Human Services, Department of Buildings & General Services and the Department of Human Resources.

#### **Environmental Testing**

**Q.** Can building employees get a list of what was tested by the environmental testing firm (ATC Associates)? And can you tell us where specifically in the building the tests were done, while being sensitive to the privacy of the individual whose work areas may have been tested?

**A.** The testing included taking multiple real-time air quality measurements and continuous monitoring for carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, relative humidity, temperature and particulate matter, taking 12 samples from carpeting for mold and bacteria and taking six wipe samples for heavy metals and a pesticide. Specific sampling locations that can be provided are attached (last two pages).

**Q.** Why did the 2000/2001 duct work need to be done?

**A.** The reason for this work was to provide better temperature zoning. It was not due to any air testing results. Specifically, the Bennington State Office Building HVAC replacement project of 2000/2001 involved only the original part of the building. This

included PATH, Probation & Parole and the Vocational Rehabilitation areas that still had the original, over 25 year old HVAC systems. This work was carried out for three reasons: general complaints about indoor air quality and temperature control from PATH and Probation & Parole; the existing PATH air system design was poor in that there was only one thermostat for the entire area; and the Probation & Parole are had poor baseboard heat zone control.

The replacement project involved redesigning and replacing the entire existing HVAC system, including new ducts (which are un-lined per current design standards) for the former PATH area and for one-third of the Vocational Rehabilitation area, which is adjacent to PATH.

Although BGS had the option of re-using the existing lined ducts by cutting into them and adding zoning features (reheat coils), this was NOT done because cutting into lined ducts would have destabilized them and made them “friable” or capable of crumbling. Instead they were entirely replaced.

The HVAC system serving Probation & Parole and the rest of Vocational Rehabilitation was adequately designed for air system zoning. Therefore, in Probation and Parole, the duct work was not replaced. Only the rooftop units were replaced. BGS added base-board heat zoning for the area and the old rooftop HVAC unit was replaced. In Vocational Rehabilitation work was deferred until this spring, and then only the old rooftop HVAC unit was replaced.

**Q.** What if employees in the building still want the inside of the old vents tested (those that have insulation on the inside) and the new vents (which have insulation on the outside)? Can these still be tested? If not, why not?

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**Q.** What if the employees still want the debris on the roof ballast tested, or at least pull out the filters from the intake ducts and have the filters tested? Filters haven't been changed since the spring of 2006.

**A.** We will wait to decide about whether to do additional environmental sampling and testing until all the information currently being collected is analyzed and reviewed. Health Department investigators have informed BGS that they can resume routine maintenance.

### **Human Resources**

**Q.** In the new employees recruitment statement that was included in the September 7 memo from the Health Department and Buildings & General Services, there is no reference to the higher than normal rate of respiratory illness such as asthma. Should higher than normal rates of asthma and asthma-like symptoms also be mentioned to prospective employees?

**A.** Yes. Because the Health Department has determined that there is a statistically

significant higher than normal incidence of asthma or asthma-like symptoms within the building, this should be added to the recruitment statement.

### **Health Survey - Former Employees**

**Q.** Can we get a date when the former employee survey will be mailed to people and the deadline for when former employees need to return them?

**A.** The health questionnaire will be mailed to former employees starting September 15. The investigators ask that these be returned within two weeks.

### **Employee Medical Screening**

**Q.** Once the employee medical screening is completed during the weeks of September 18 and 25, how long will it take for employees to get their individual results from NIOSH?

**A.** NIOSH will mail to each employee their individual test results three weeks following the completion of all tests.

### **OSHA Standards and Relocation**

**Q.** What is the bar that is going to be used to measure all the testing results against? For example, will the results of all the testing be measured against the VOSHA standards that seem to permit high levels of stuff in the air or in the building? Or are there other kinds of standards that the testing results will be measured against?

Likewise, is there a threshold number of sarcoidosis cases/diagnoses that need to be met before there is a determination that there is a major problem with this building?

**A.** The only quantitative standards available that can be used to help decide if building occupants should be relocated are the Permissible Exposure Limits for contaminants provided by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). These are listed at OSHA's website: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

The visual inspection of the building performed on August 7 did not reveal the presence of any of the contaminants for which OSHA provides exposure limits.

However, additional information – including information from the health surveys, medical screening tests and environmental sampling – will all be taken into account in determining whether to relocate employees.

**Q.** Is anyone working on plans or discussing plans for alternate work sites to relocate some or all building employees if that becomes necessary? If the building is determined to be unsafe and must be closed, what kind of timeframe will be set to get everyone out of here? And what will this process look like?

**A.** The Department of Buildings and General Services is responsible for coordinating, allocating and designating uses of state-owned buildings. BGS maintains an inventory of

all existing facilities and is charged, by statute, with the task of making sure that all state agency space needs are met. With that in mind, BGS is poised to address any issue or need that may arise with regard to this office space.

**Other**

**Q.** There are a lot of specific building projects on hold. Is there specific work that the local Buildings staff can resume or do? Can any work resume on projects that need to be done?

**A.** The Health Department investigators have informed BGS that routine maintenance can resume in the building.

**Q.** The Building Stakeholders Team would like dates when the work in each of the following three areas is expected to be completed: (a) environmental testing; (b) health surveys of current and former employees; and (c) medical screening scheduled for later in September.

**A.** The environmental sampling will be completed on September 15. The samples will be sent to a laboratory for testing. All laboratory results are expected to be available within the next several weeks. Current employees had until August 30 to complete the health survey. Health surveys of former employees are being mailed September 15. The investigators are asking they be returned within two weeks. The medical screening tests will conclude on September 28

**Q.** Once the information from the environmental testing, health surveys and medical screening is completed and analyzed, how long will it take for a decision to be made about what happens next? How long before the building employees get the results and hear about any decisions that have been made?

**A.** We will keep you updated on survey and testing results, and other new information, developments or decisions as the investigation proceeds. As we have added the medical screening tests and other work to the investigation, a final report will likely not be available until that work is complete.

### **Environmental Sampling Locations**

Environmental sampling locations were determined based on preliminary findings from the health survey and input from VSEA and employee representatives. The following provided the locations recommended to ATC for all sampling except for the wipe sampling. As the wipe samplings were done in the offices of the employees with sarcoidosis, these locations are not being identified.

Real-time air quality measurements for carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, relative humidity, temperature and particulate matter:

- Old part of DOC in rooms A92, A90, A87, A84, reception area A100 and others as appropriate.
- Vocational Rehabilitation in rooms A15, A16, A21 and reception area.
- Economic Services in rooms in A68, A67, A66, A52, A53, A51, A46, A44, A33, A41, A36
- Department of Labor in room A138, the back offices southwest wall and the cubicles along south wall
- Department of Corrections (formerly VDH office space): Offices in side hallway and reception area (multiple samples).
- Family Court: Lobby, representative sample in the northwest wall office space that borders back of court room, both court rooms, file room east side of magistrate court room, judges chambers
- Office of Child Support and ISAP Group Room: Front and back of area and in rooms 237 and 236; multiple samples in room 220
- State's Attorney's office in rooms 346, 351, 343 and in reception area.
- Family Services in rooms 307, 312, family visiting room 320, 326, 327 and 335
- District Court: Court A and B and in two judges chambers; jury room A

Continuous monitoring for carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, relative humidity, temperature and particulate matter:

- Old part of DOC in middle hall between A94, A96, A79
- Vocational Rehabilitation in reception area.
- Economic Services A35 clerical reception area
- Department of Labor in middle of cubicle space
- Department of Corrections (formerly VDH office space): Outside office 121/122
- Family Court: Clerk's office space between magistrate court and family court
- Office of Child Support and ISAP Group Room: Hallway outside room 237
- Front and back of area and in rooms 237 and 236; multiple samples in room 220
- State's Attorney's office in reception area.
- Family Services outside offices 324 and 325
- District Court: Clerks office space between 2 court rooms

Vacuum sampling:

- Old part of DOC: south hall way near office A79 and north hallway outside of A90, A92, A91
- Vocational Rehabilitation in reception area.
- Economic Services outside A35 ckerucak reception area and outside A50/A53
- Department of Labor middle of cubicle space
- Department of Corrections (formerly VDH office space): outside office 121/122
- Family Court: Clerk's office space between magistrate court and family court
- Office of Child Support and ISAP Group Room: Hallway outside room 237
- Front and back of area and in rooms 237and 236; multiple samples in room 220
- State's Attorney's office in reception area
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