

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/state/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_21\\_2375086,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/state/article/0,1299,DRMN_21_2375086,00.html)

### Primer on Zonolite

**October 25, 2003**

- What is it?: Zonolite was an insulation product manufactured by W.R. Grace using a vermiculite ore from a mountain in Libby, Mont. Vermiculite is a mineral that, when heated, expands into accordion-shaped pieces that are fire-resistant, absorbent, odorless and, therefore, good attic insulation.
- What's wrong with it? The Libby vermiculite is contaminated by a highly toxic form of asbestos, known as "tremolite" asbestos, a naturally occurring mineral found in the same area as the vermiculite. The tremolite fibers easily become airborne and are inhaled, an event that can lead to fatal lung diseases.
  - Local connection: W.R. Grace owned a facility in south Denver, called Western Minerals. That plant converted the Libby vermiculite into Zonolite and distributed it in the region. The EPA believes the Western Minerals facility received at least 100,000 tons of the ore from Libby.
  - Where is it? Somewhat older homes have a better chance of having the insulation, as Western Minerals in Denver stopped processing it about 1990. The most likely properties with the material would presumably be those insulated between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, when the Western Minerals facility operated. But it's possible homes built both before and after that contain the vermiculite insulation.
  - How do I know if I have it? The EPA describes the insulation as a pebble-like, pour-in product, usually light-brown or gold in color. It has also been described as "brown Styrofoam" or "dirty Styrofoam." In some cases, homeowners have made an unhappy discovery: discarded packing bags in their attic labeled "Zonolite."

[www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov)

Copyright 2003, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

Advertisement



**WIRELESS  
PLANS  
STARTING**

