

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

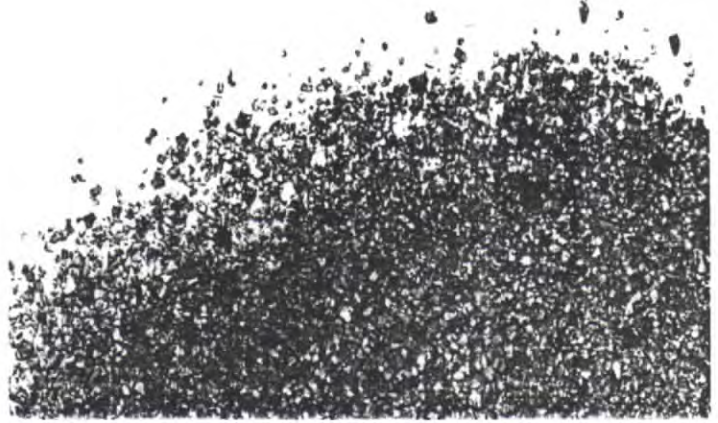
## EPA urges remodelers not to mess with vermiculite insulation

Recent reports in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the *Boston Globe* and other sources have revealed that most of the vermiculite used as insulation in this country contains small amounts of asbestos. The culprit is Zonolite Attic Insulation. Zonolite was manufactured by W. R. Grace & Co. from 1963 through 1984 and sold primarily as a do-it-yourself product for adding insulation to older homes. According to Grace, Zonolite was seldom used in new construction.

Grace controlled about 85% of the market for vermiculite insulation; and all of Grace's attic fill came from a Libby,

Montana, mine that was closed in 1990. The *Post-Intelligencer* investigation revealed that hundreds of miners and their family members became seriously ill as a result of long-term exposure to tremolite asbestos, which occurred naturally in the vermiculite ore mined in Libby. Processing removed most but not all of the asbestos.

Homeowners who discover vermiculite in their walls or attics can have it tested to determine asbestos content, but according to the EPA, they should be able to leave it in place without fear. "Asbestos is a hazardous air pollutant, not a toxic substance," says Wayne



**How to identify vermiculite.** Unlike cellulose, which is fluffy and gray, or rock wool, which looks like tufts of gray steel wool, vermiculite is made up of granular particles that can be as large as a pencil eraser. Vermiculite colors range from silver to pinkish-brown, but tend to darken with age. Photo by Tom O'Brien.

Toland of the EPA. The asbestos fibers are not a health threat unless they are stirred up and inhaled. Anyone working in an area that contains vermiculite should wear an appropriate respirator.

Toland recommends testing before beginning any remodeling project that involves disturbing Zonolite. If the as-

bestos content is greater than 1%, asbestos professionals should be called in to make sure the material is removed safely and that living areas are not contaminated.

For more information on Zonolite Attic Insulation or asbestos, call the EPA (888-372-7341), or visit its Web site ([www.epa.gov/asbestos](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos)).