



**ARD NET**

**Asbestos-Related Disease Network**

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My name is Karol Spas. I have been the county health nurse in Libby for the past 25 yrs. I have never spoke at a hearing like this before, but I was compelled to do so today. When I came to Libby, there were the usual public health issues like childhood immunizations, contagious disease follow up, school screenings. However, 25 yrs ago, there were no Home Health services in our area, so I set up a countywide Home Health agency. I had many patients that suffered from lung problems. In 1999, the truth began to unfold about the miners at the vermiculite mine who inhaled the dust and brought it home on their clothes to their families. People used the vermiculite everywhere, in their gardens, in their homes for insulation. It sat around in piles on the baseball field and was so pretty and sparkly that kids used to play with it. To date, about 2000 people have been diagnosed with asbestos related disease in Libby and approximately 250 people have died from it.

In 2003, through the Health Department, I set up a program called ARD NET, asbestos related disease network. There is a case manager who refers people for screening as well as assists people diagnosed with asbestos related disease to apply for the various medical and social programs available. We also provide some home assistance for people such as nursing visits, bathing, assistance with housework, meal preparation and especially assistance with heavy household chores. These are the kinds of things very difficult for people with diminished lung capacity to do. We also hold monthly meetings with medical and social service providers to coordinate and avoid duplication of services.

WR Grace has a medical program but it has been my observation that it has been increasingly selective about the people accepted and about the medical expenses paid, even to the point of denying payment for vital items such as oxygen and hospitalizations.

Besides ARD NET and LAMP, CARD, the Center for Asbestos Related Disease is trying to meet the needs of those living with exposures and disease. All of these entities are struggling financially. Funds are needed for the short term. Hopefully, in the upcoming trial, WR Grace will be held accountable for the clean up and medical expenses. It is essential that the local health board, who knows the needs, be able to distribute the funds.

I know you are being approached by all kinds of groups for funding. As a county health nurse I know there is a lot of discussion about being prepared for potential emergencies and disasters. The truth be known, Libby is currently suffering a huge disaster. It is not a potential or a possibility. People have died and more are dying. It's not only a nonpartisan issue; it is a real one. Please help us.

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