



**Alaska Native  
Tribal Health Consortium**

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***POSITION PAPER***

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**RE:** HB 258 Naturally Occurring Asbestos

**POSITION:** Support

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The benefits of clean water and sanitation to a community's health have been demonstrated world-wide, and among them are the reduction of illness and death from gastrointestinal infection, especially among children and elderly residents. In rural Alaska Native residents, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) have clearly shown a reduction in hospitalization for lower respiratory infection in infants residing in villages with piped water. This is especially significant in Alaska, where rural Alaska Native infants have one of the highest rates of hospitalization for severe respiratory infection in the US.

The presence of trained village-based providers, Community Health Aides, in village clinics, has greatly contributed to a steady reduction in early recognition of complicated pregnancy, ability to stabilize ill and injured residents, timely immunizations in infants and children, and follow-up of the chronically ill, allowing more people with serious medical conditions to live in their villages. All of these advantages have greatly contributed to a steady reduction in maternal and infant mortality, death from injury, and increased life expectancy among Alaska Natives.

The health hazards of naturally occurring asbestos in dust from construction activities in village in Alaska has never been quantified. The signature disease, malignant mesothelioma, has not been seen in any Alaska Native, in the 43 year record of the Alaska Native Tumor Registry. In a review of chest x-rays of individuals residing in the Kobuk Valley villages, age 50 or more in 2005, 21 of 130 chest x-rays had evidence of possible asbestosis. Interviews were conducted with those still alive at that time, and a number had an occupational history of exposure, and others could not exclude that possibility. No death certificate of any resident of the region had an asbestosis or mesothelioma diagnosis.

In summary, the Public Health evaluation of NOA in Ambler in 2005 concluded that disease caused by NOA could not be definitely established or excluded. The establishment of effective environmental control mechanisms, monitoring, and training with adequate protective equipment for workers should reduce the theoretic risk from dust and disturbed geologic deposits to levels that meet OSHA standards, and enable the community to take advantage of the well-established risk reduction that piped water, adequate sewage management, and modern CHA clinics can provide.

ANTHC supports passage of HB 258.