VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

TO: Bennington State Office Building Stakeholder Team

FROM: Sharon Moffatt, RN, MSN, Commissioner
Vermont Department of Health

THROUGH: Charlie Gingo, Agency of Human Services
Bennington District Field Director

RE: Investigation Update

DATE: December 7, 2006

Background information, updates, and reports on the investigation as it progresses are always available on the Health Department's website: *healthvermont.gov*, then select *Community Public Health*.

Community and Statewide Assessment of Sarcoidosis
Health Department investigators have calculated rates of sarcoidosis, using information from five major insurers covering approximately 70 percent of the Vermont population.

From 2001-2005, the rate of sarcoidosis (calculated as a five-year period prevalence) was 169 cases per 100,000 Vermonters. Rutland County had the highest rate (251/100,000) of the 14 counties, followed by Bennington County and Addison County (each with a rate of 203/100,000).

The rate of sarcoidosis among occupants of the Bennington State Office Building is approximately eight times higher than that of Bennington County as a whole, and 9.5 times higher than the state as a whole. This finding further supports the idea that if there is a source or cause of the health effects reported among building occupants, that source would most likely be within the building – and not in the community in general.

Concerns about Cancer
The Health Department has received questions about whether there are an unusual number of cases of cancer among building occupants. Although Health Department investigators understand and appreciate these concerns, the focus of this investigation is sarcoidosis and not cancer, for the following reasons:

- Sarcoidosis is not a form of cancer and is not related to cancer in any way. Nothing in our investigation has suggested that people are getting cancer as a result of being in the building.

- Cancer is not a single disease, but many different diseases with many different risk factors and causes.

- Cancer is common, especially as people live longer lives. In the U.S., about one out of three women and one out of two men will eventually have some type of cancer. Because science and medicine have found cures or treatments for many diseases that used to contribute to premature death, people are generally living longer. Living longer increases a person's chances of having a diagnosis of cancer. Given all of this, it is not unusual to know several people who have some type of cancer.

- Cancer does not develop immediately. Instead, there is generally a long period of time between exposure to a cancer-causing agent and the medical diagnosis of cancer. Cancers that are diagnosed now are usually related to many years of certain habits (such as smoking) or exposure to a cancer-causing agent many years ago – or to genetic factors that are not linked to environmental or behavioral causes.

Expert Consultation to the Investigative Team
The Health Department has consulted with outside experts as part of the investigative process. These have included experts at the National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the group that conducted the medical screening tests for current employees. NIOSH has considerable expertise in investigating health effects that are attributed to buildings.

Gerald Davis, MD, professor of medicine at the University of Vermont, is also beginning work with our investigation team to review sarcoidosis cases, and to lead the research study that is being planned. The study will involve analysis of blood samples for factors that may indicate a predisposition for sarcoidosis.

The Health Department's investigative team includes:

- Cort Lohff, MD, MPH — State Epidemiologist – Lead Investigator
- Bill Bress, PhD — State Toxicologist
- Austin Sumner, MD, MPH — Environmental Epidemiologist
- Lynn Blevins, MD, MPH — Medical Epidemiologist
- Scott Laney, PhD, MPH — CDC Epidemiology Intelligence Service Officer
- Lori Cragin, MS — Environmental Epidemiologist

Environmental Assessment/Soil Testing
The Health Department has asked the Department of Environmental Conservation to review the environmental site assessments conducted by State Toxicologist Bill Bress, PhD, who is recognized as a national leader in environmental toxicology, and offer any additional recommendations regarding the question of soil testing. In addition, based on a request from the Stakeholders Team, the Agency of Agriculture has been asked to test soil for three pesticides that may have been used on a nearby farm field.