

Save Spodden Valley campaign

c/o 183 Rooley Moor Road, Rochdale

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Further asbestos contamination confirmed at former TBA Spodden Valley site.

20,000 asbestos fibres per cubic metre recorded BEFORE the factory fire.

Air monitoring tests conducted BEFORE the February 15th fire at the former Turner Brothers Asbestos (TBA) Rochdale asbestos site have recorded elevated levels of asbestos fibres in the air.

Two weeks on, campaigners and experts have had no explanation how press statements, issued on the day of the fire, confidently stated that no asbestos had been released and there had been no risk to public health. It is understood that these assurances were based on a visible inspection of the smoke plume that came from the site of what was once the world's largest asbestos textile factory. Even though Rochdale's MP called for urgent air monitoring whilst the fire was raging, no air monitoring was conducted to assess the aftermath of the blaze

Weeks before the fire, asbestos tests were conducted by United Utilities for their work in improving water quality to the River Spodden. Part of the water company's work to improve the sewerage system from Shawclough requires connecting an electrically powered unit to a sewer plant at the edge of the 72 acre former asbestos factory site. Baseline air monitoring and soil testing have been conducted in order to ensure steps are taken for UU contractors and the public to be safe.

January's test results confirm reasons for concern: Some of the UU testing has confirmed elevated levels of asbestos - 0.02f /ml - that equates to **20,000 fibres per cubic metre** - in the open air 300 metres from the main TBA buildings. This is double the fibre count used as a "clearance level" after, for instance, sealed buildings have been professionally cleared of asbestos containing materials. The threshold of 0.01f/m is not classed as a safe workplace level – in fact the HSE confirm that there is no known safe level for asbestos exposure.

It not known why such elevated asbestos fibre levels have been present. Campaigners and experts are now raising concerns.

Jason Addy of the Save Spodden Valley campaign comments:

"United Utilities are to be applauded for the precautions they have taken and the open way they have tested and published their findings. This confirms our long-held concerns about environmental exposure to asbestos in the Spodden Valley. We have been asking for baseline air monitoring for years but it has never happened. Do these test result help to explain why?"

Workplace exposure to asbestos is normally calculated for being working in enclosed buildings for about 8 hours a day 5 days a week. Those subject to environmental contamination could be exposed 24-7. Experts suggest environmental exposure amounts to about a 40 fold increase compared to calculations for workplace exposure.

These tests were done BEFORE the fire on 15th February. Why on earth wasn't air monitoring at the TBA done whilst the fire raged and on the immediately days after the inferno? It beggars belief that no air testing was done yet confident claims were broadcast on BBC Radio Manchester that Friday suggesting that no asbestos had been released and there was no risk to public health."

Rochdale's MP Simon Danczuk has asked Greater Manchester Hazards Centre to investigate issues of health and safety regarding the TBA fire. An interim report is to be sent to the All-Party Parliamentary Sub Committee.

ENDS

Notes:

UU air monitoring test results were presented to William Hobhouse, Chair of the TBA Working Party. These are available on request as a PDF document.

Air monitoring results were measured in fibre millimetres (f/ml). A millilitre of air equates to 1 cubic centimetre (about the size of a sugar cube). An average human inhales over 10 cubic metres of air a day. Measurements based on cubic metres of air are often used by many experts within the European Union to quantify such nano-sized particles