



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MINNESOTA TACONITE WORKERS HEALTH STUDY

# Respiratory Health Survey of Taconite Workers & Spouses



# University of Minnesota research team

## **School of Public Health:**

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## **Medical School:**

- Dr. David Perlman
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# The Study Team in Silver Bay

- Nancy Tekautz, RN, Supervisor
- Karen Johnson, RN
- Cole Fisher



# Background

- University of Minnesota asked by the State to study whether exposure to dust from the taconite industry is harmful to workers and spouses
- Study funded by State of Minnesota, Iron Range Resources and the University of Minnesota. Supported by Minnesota Department of Health
- Report issued by MDH in 2007 did not assess exposures to dust from taconite operations but indicated unusual number of mesothelioma (cancer of lining of lung)



# Purpose of this investigation

- To determine whether miners and their spouses have lung problems that could be related to their work in the taconite industry
- To assess workers for other lung conditions, i.e. lung scarring



# Respiratory Health Survey

- 2000 subjects
  - 1200 former and current taconite workers from across the Mesabi Iron Range.
  - Up to 800 spouses
- Clinic appointment is a one time visit and includes:
  - Health history questionnaire (completed at home)
  - Two types of lung function/breathing tests
  - Chest x-ray
  - Chest and physical exam
  - Blood draw; storage of blood

**Appointment expected to take approximately 2 hours**



# Who is asked to participate?

- Selection is based on employment records from multiple companies and includes:
  - A range of ages
  - A variety of years of working and jobs held in the taconite industry
  - Workers from different Range locations



# Participation

- Your participation is voluntary
- You must be randomly selected and receive letter of invitation to participate
- We must have very high level of participation from those selected for results to be scientifically meaningful





# Participation

- You will be getting a high quality lung exam for no cost
- You will receive a summary of your results
- Early identification of lung scarring is the best time
- Your results will be forwarded to your doctor only with your permission



# Confidentiality

- Participation is absolutely confidential.
- Names of participants are not revealed to anyone outside the study team.
- Personal Health Information is secured at all times.



# Why should you participate?

- This is a large, important study that will determine whether lung conditions may be associated with exposure to dust from taconite operations
- Your findings may assure current & future mine workers that they are working in a safe environment



# Don't we already know there's a link between taconite work and health?

- No - The work needed to establish a link between the 63 mesothelioma cases and mining has not been done
- No one study has addressed all the health and risk questions related to taconite mining this study will cover



# Important Key Issues

- Employers do not know who is participating or the results - we don't identify participants to anyone
- We report group findings only
- If a problem is found that may be related to dust exposure, it's important to report this to your physician, as one would do through the course of routine medical care
- If you don't have a physician and want one, we'll help you find one



# Important Key Issues

- The main reason for doing this study is to detect lung conditions that may be related to dust
- Participation will help us understand what effects these dusts have on your lungs
- Participation will help sustain the industry into the future
- Participation doesn't mean a problem will be identified
- Not participating doesn't mean a problem won't be identified by your physician at some time



# What if I am *not* asked to participate but I have health concerns?

- We will assist any current or former miners who are not selected
- We are working with local doctors so they know the types of tests we are providing
- They may be able to administer these same tests if needed
- For more assistance or concerns, call our toll-free number 1-888-840-7590



# This survey is one part of the Minnesota Taconite Workers Health Study

- Also looking at causes of death among workers, cases of mesothelioma, cancer and other respiratory disease
- Looking at the air and environment by conducting air sampling at workplace sites





# Contact Us

- Call our toll-free number:  
1-888-840-7590
- Also, see our website:  
[www.taconiteworkers.umn.edu](http://www.taconiteworkers.umn.edu)

**Thank you!**

