TESTIMONY OF

COMMISSIONER MARIANNE B. ROOSE

LINCOLN COUNTY, MONTANA BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

BEFORE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

APRIL 5, 2007

LIBBY, MONTANA

Thank you Senator Baucus and other Committee Members for allowing me this time today to testify at this hearing on behalf of the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners.

We are very grateful that Congress, and especially Senator Baucus, is following through on their commitment to address the asbestos issues affecting Libby and Troy in southern Lincoln County. Your sincerity is greatly appreciated by all of us.

I would like to offer my testimony today by answering three questions that I believe would be informative for this hearing.

1. **What issues are we facing?** The main issue that our communities are still facing and of which there is still no answer is "How clean is clean?". When this cleanup process was first started, there was a lot of discussion whether the air is safe to breathe in Libby and what is a safe level of asbestos. After seven years into the clean-up process, there is still no definitive answer. Homes are being cleaned now but the asbestos is being left in the walls. Previously, it was felt that this was safe as long as it was not disturbed. That is now being questioned by both the public and E.P.A. itself. There is a possibility that the EPA may have to go back in and re-clean homes that have already been cleaned. Six years into the project, it was determined that more air testing has to be done to determine if the air is safe here even though originally we were assured it was. That testing will take another year to complete while all the time we still have that question hanging over our head. This leads to rumors, anxiety, and general distrust of the work that has been completed to date.

2. **What has the uncertainty regarding the clean-up cost the community?** The uncertainty of not knowing what a safe level of asbestos is and is the air in Libby safe to breathe continues to be on the forefront of visitors, organizers of community events, and people looking to relocate to Libby.

   Some recent examples include a reduction in participation for our annual Nordic Fjord horse show. Some participants have declined coming because they are uncertain if the air is safe and whether the soil in the arena area poses an unsafe condition for their horses. Even though we have reassured them that it is safe, the uncertainty of knowing for sure has led to cancellations of participants. Another example is the recruitment efforts at St. Johns Hospital. We have been told that there have been several doctors that would have liked to relocate here due to our area beauty and lifestyle but are uncertain whether it is safe to raise their children here. There are many more examples of these types of public uncertainty that keep hanging over our head.

3. **What can/should EPA do to address the communities' needs?** First let me say that we think the EPA is doing a very good job with their clean-up efforts in Libby. It has been a process of learning as we go. When problems have occurred

in the past, E.P.A. has been receptive to changing their practices or procedures to address those. They continue to listen to the public and to our concerns and adjust programs to better serve our communities.

There are some things that we think can be done to help improve conditions in Libby and also let the "world" know that Libby is a safe place to live or visit.

Thought should be given to demolishing homes, with reimbursement given to the owners, for homes where the cost of clean-up is substantially more than the value of the house being cleaned. Considering Senator Baucus has recently directed Fannie Mae to work with Libby and our other communities for affordable housing, there may be a plausible solution that the federal agencies working together could identify that would benefit both the homeowner and the government. It seems that it may be more of a taxpayer advantage to have E.P.A. review the cost effectiveness of clean-up compared to demolition and at the same time be able to offer low interest loans to these homeowners through the Fannie Mae program.

Troy residents are concerned that clean-up efforts have been delayed in their community. We hope that the effort in Troy remains on schedule for starting the project this spring and is not delayed.

Another community need is a research center with a clinical side that would be able to treat our resident victims locally with the latest available means. It seems very logical to us that research and treatment should be done where the source of contamination is heaviest.

Also, our local emergency service organizations, especially our fire departments, need additional protective equipment to be able to respond to emergencies in contaminated homes. It is unfair to ask volunteers to respond to these emergencies and put themselves and their families at risk without appropriate protective equipment and clothing.

After air quality testing and other testing is completed, we also need substantial media coverage outside of the area to let everyone know that Libby is a safe place to visit, raise your kids, or to retire here. The current stigma of "unsafe" attached to Libby needs to be overcome so that we can continue to try to improve our economy, have families look at us as a great place to live, and be able to get our pride back as a community.

I want to thank all of you for your time today and extend a special thanks to Senator Baucus for remaining concerned about Libby and our future.