

Libby's tragic story told Tuesday in PBS documentary
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The PBS series "P.O.V." next week takes a long hard look at the devastating toll asbestos exposure has had on Libby.

"Libby, Montana" by filmmakers Drury Gunn Carr and Doug Hawes-Davis airs Tuesday at 8 p.m. on Montana PBS.

Seventy years of strip-mining vermiculite ore and marketing a product called Zonolite exposed workers, their families and thousands of residents to asbestos fibers, creating what the Environmental Protection Agency has called the worst case of industrial poisoning of a whole community in American history. W.R. Grace acquired the Zonolite Company in 1963 and closed the mine in 1990.

The film takes a working day's journey into a blue-collar community, raising questions about the role of corporate power in American politics.

An estimated 35 million homes in the U.S. contain Zonolite insulation. When the EPA began screening Libby residents in 2001, more than 1,200 of those tested were found to have lung abnormalities associated with asbestos exposure. Libby was declared a national Superfund site in 2002.

The directors of "Libby, Montana" use archival footage, news reports and interviews with a range of participants, from ex-miners and their families to Earl Lovick, the mine's former head manager who died in 1999.

"Even as we documented the history of the town and the clean-up efforts, the story of Libby took on a larger life as Congress was forced to consider what to do about the millions of homes and other buildings in the U.S. filled with vermiculite from Libby," co-director Drury Gunn Carr said.

"Libby is a hard-working, blue-collar community that personifies the American Dream, but the story we had to tell was about the dream gone horribly wrong. Industrialists, politicians, workers and ordinary citizens all play a role in this American tragedy," adds co-director Doug Hawes-Davis.