Since discovering the presence of asbestos in McGill Hall last month, a number of UM employees have inquired about having their offices tested. This email message provides guidance and information about how Facilities Services will continue to address the issue of asbestos in our campus buildings. A copy of this message will be posted on the asbestos information page.

As noted in the university’s Asbestos Operations and Maintenance Plan, we follow a practice endorsed by the EPA known as “managing in place” for all existing asbestos containing materials (ACMs). The presence of asbestos is not, in and of itself, a hazard. Rather, we know that when it is disturbed — particularly when it becomes airborne in high concentrations -- it can pose a health risk. This is why we follow very specific protocols when performing activities with the potential to disturb ACMs.

It’s important to understand that buildings constructed with ACMs will commonly have asbestos fibers in settled dust as the result of normal age-related deterioration of these materials. In the case of McGill Hall, we now believe some of the asbestos fibers detected in surface wipe samples are likely the result of surface wear on floor tiles that have asbestos fibers in them. We are investigating other potential sources. To mitigate the risk from the floor tiles, we are cleaning and resealing the floors with multiple coats of wax. This is an accepted industry practice for managing asbestos in place. In other areas, such as mechanical rooms or in areas which are not regularly cleaned, we are developing an enhanced cleaning schedule to ensure that dust does not accumulate over long periods of time and is, instead, managed through periodic cleaning.

None of the air tests, which were conducted in buildings with confirmed presence of asbestos in dust, have indicated that we have an airborne asbestos hazard.

We do not plan to conduct surface wipe sampling in buildings or individual offices; we assume the likelihood of the presence of asbestos in settled dust and will manage it accordingly. Air testing will be conducted as required by state law when we perform abatement, repairs or activities which require air clearance testing post-project.

For concerns about pipe fittings, thermal system insulation and other potential mechanical sources of asbestos risk, Facilities Services will amplify its schedule and documentation process for visual inspections of these systems. We are coordinating with the MUS for consistency system-wide among all units.

If employees have specific concerns about the potential for asbestos in their office – either that they see suspect materials or notice deterioration of floors, drywall, ducts or other physical
features – they should contact the Facilities Services work order desk online (if authorized) or by calling 243-6091 to arrange a visual inspection of the area and subsequent actions as necessary.