

## NEWS RELEASE

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111 TASF  
Ames, IA 50011-3020  
<http://www.ameslab.gov>



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**Contacts:**

[Jim Withers](#), Environment, Safety, Health and Assurance,  
515-294-4743  
[Steve Karsjen](#), Public Affairs,  
515-294-5643

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### **AMES LABORATORY IDENTIFIES CONTAMINATION IN SPEDDING HALL PRIOR TO START OF ENERGY SAVINGS PROJECT**

AMES, Iowa – Testing performed in preparation for a project designed to save energy in the U.S. Department of Energy Ames Laboratory's Spedding Hall has indicated beryllium contamination in some of the building's disused fume hood ventilation stacks. The stacks in question, no longer in use, are sealed off from laboratory and office spaces occupied by employees and are closed at the top.

Laboratory officials said there was no indication of a health risk to employees -- since testing of Spedding Hall office and lab areas for beryllium contamination as recently as a year ago indicated no detectable levels of the element. However, office and lab surface areas are being retested as a precaution, they said, with results expected next week. Additional stack testing and air sampling on the roof will be performed next week. Employees working in the areas of the building near the affected stacks were informed when results came in and have continued normal use of office and lab space. Laboratory Director Alex King also issued a laboratory-wide memorandum on the finding to all Ames employees earlier this week.

The tests were conducted recently as a precautionary step in preparation for energy saving projects in Spedding Hall that include lining of the building's vent stacks. When they were operational, the chimney-like ventilation stacks where the beryllium was detected were used to continuously move air from laboratory fume hoods to an exhaust system on the building's roof. It is believed that the beryllium work in Spedding Hall may have taken place as long as several decades ago.

Because fume hood ventilation stacks are specifically designed to carry potentially harmful fumes and materials away from research spaces, it is not unexpected that residue from research compounds might be present in the stacks. Some radiological contamination was anticipated, due to historical activities related to uranium and thorium production processes in Spedding Hall,

and in some of the stacks elevated levels of radiological contamination were recorded, mostly as fixed contamination.

Initial results of beryllium wipe tests indicated levels of beryllium above the detection limit (which is 0.5 micrograms per 100 square centimeters) in several of the inactive stacks.

Results from a 2008 beryllium survey of spaces – mostly hallways and offices – in the Technical and Administrative Services Facility, the Metals Development building, Wilhelm Hall and Spedding Hall, indicated no detectable levels of beryllium. Testing is also planned for other fume vent stacks in Spedding Hall.

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*Note to Editors:* A beryllium fact sheet and two reports on environmental surveys for beryllium at Ames Laboratory can be found at: [www.ameslab.gov/beryllium.htm](http://www.ameslab.gov/beryllium.htm). Additional information regarding the regulation of beryllium at DOE sites may be found on the Office of Health Safety and Security web site at: <http://www.hss.energy.gov/healthsafety/wshp/be/>