

- o The majority of ash particles (> 90 per cent by count) were $\leq 10 \mu\text{m}$ in aerodynamic diameter, respirable in size, and belonged to the plagioclase (glass) mineral class of aluminium silicates and other oxides.³⁰

- o A small percentage of the respirable-size particles consisted of potentially hazardous polymorphs of free crystalline silica (about 4 per cent cristobalite and 3 per cent quartz by weight) which can cause pulmonary fibrosis (silicosis) if inhaled over prolonged periods of time at airborne concentrations greater than about $50 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ (i.e., ambient concentrations of respirable size volcanic ash $\geq 700 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, containing ≥ 7 per cent free silica).^{27,30,58}

- o No harmful amounts of respirable-size asbestiform fibers were detected and no excessive amounts of leachable toxic metals or acids (e.g., mercury, fluorides, and arsenic) were noted.³⁰

Air Sampling

Between June 3 and 13, 1980, a team of four NIOSH industrial hygienists collected personal ("breathing-zone") and general area samples of airborne dusts in ash-affected communities of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. Indoor samples were collected in homes, schools, and other public buildings. Outdoor samples were collected in a variety of occupational settings in which workers were likely to be exposed to resuspended volcanic ash (e.g., clean-up crews, forest and agricultural workers, and law enforcement personnel). Standard occupational air sampling methods were used to collect respirable-size ($< 10 \mu\text{m}$ in diameter) dusts suspected of containing toxic and inert minerals.^{14(4,12,16-18)}

Geometric mean concentrations of respirable mixed dusts ranged from 30 to $100 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for nonoccupational exposures, while most community occupational exposures ranged from 50 to $570 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.^{14(4,14,16-18),27} 7 The results of NIOSH air sampling indicated that only the occupational exposures for certain categories of workers in heavy ashfall areas exceeded $800 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in a significant number of samples taken during dry weather. However, even these exposures were transient, and the per cent of volcanic ash in environmental dusts was likely to decrease with time if there were no further major ashfalls. Because of the potential for more intense, frequent, and prolonged exposures, workers involved in operations that created a visible dust cloud (e.g., certain job categories in logging and agricul-

ture) were advised to wear goggles and NIOSH-recommended single-use or multiple-use high-efficiency face masks. 14,55

For reasons discussed below, it was considered unlikely that the adult general population exposed to volcanic ash from the eruptions of Mount St. Helens would be at risk of developing pulmonary fibrosis or new onset of obstructive airways diseases. 14,27,28 However, it was considered possible that those with preexisting bronchial hyperreactivity of chronic lung disease might experience exacerbations of their problems. In addition, the risks for exposed children could not be predicted from available data, and avoidance of exposure was generally recommended. 14,55

Toxicity Studies

Laboratory studies were initiated to determine the toxicity of the volcanic ash. Several different *in vitro* biologic tests indicated the ash to be mildly fibrogenic in a fashion which was dose-dependent⁵⁹ and proportional to the surface area or particle count in the test media. 30,60,61 The fibrogenic potential of volcanic ash was also observed *in vivo* in short-term animal experiments 30,62,63 and supported in the pulmonary histological findings of autopsy studies of two loggers who died in hospital following thermal injuries and heavy exposures to ash on May 18.51,63,64

Ash extracts were not mutagenic in two microbial assay systems and particulate ash had no effect on interferon production by monkey kidney cell monolayers or on the human complement system *in vitro*. 14(9),30 Marked inhibition of the antibacterial substance superoxide anion from ash-exposed and zymosan-stimulated alveolar macrophages suggested that volcanic ash may impair antibacterial lung defense mechanisms. 30,65

The results of the above NIOSH toxicology studies and those of investigators in other laboratories are reviewed in more detail in chapter 6. In order of decreasing likelihood, the following adverse respiratory health effects were deemed biologically plausible if individuals received intense, frequent, or prolonged exposures: 14,27-30, 32,33,51

1. Acute irritation of the eyes, nasopharynx, and airways;
2. For individuals with preexisting or ash-induced bronchial hyperreactivity, more severe forms of respiratory distress and pulmonary impairment;

3. For individuals with preexisting chronic mucus hypersecretion or obstructive airways diseases, exacerbation and/or acceleration of these diseases and related impairment;

4. Potential for delayed-onset of ash-induced mucus hypersecretion or obstructive airways disease;

5. Potential for delayed-onset of ash-induced pulmonary fibrosis or "pneumo(vol)coniosis."

Epidemiologic Studies of High-risk Groups

Surveillance or "numerator" data alone could not be used to assess the adverse respiratory health impact of volcanic ash exposures on high-risk groups. For example, such data could not be used to evaluate the effectiveness of media directives advising patients with chronic respiratory disease to remain indoors or use respiratory protection. Additional information was obtained by cross-sectional, case-control, and longitudinal studies of high risk groups—those who were presumed to be hypersusceptible because of risk factors such as pre-existing chronic respiratory disease, or those who were heavily exposed to volcanic ash at work.

Hypersusceptible Individuals

To examine the possible etiologic relationships between ash exposure and acute onset or exacerbation or pre-existing respiratory problems, two studies were conducted—a case-control study, and an exposure-referent study.²⁴ For both studies, data on personal exposures were estimated from the EPA's rooftop monitoring of TSP levels because it was not possible to obtain or reliably estimate data on breathing-zone concentrations of respirable-size dust. In the study community which had received the heaviest ashfalls (Yakima), TSP levels varied as described in Table 1 and Figure 2. Over 90 per cent of the ash particles which sedimented to the ground in central and eastern Washington were $< 10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ in diameter and thus were within the respirable range. Presumably, the vast majority of excess TSP, collected by EPA monitoring devices at rooftop levels, consisted of this highly respirable volcanic ash.

For the case-control study, patients with symptomatic asthma and acute bronchitis were identified from surveillance hospitals located in the most heavily impacted communities and one control was selected for each patient: a person of the same age (adults ± 5 years, children ± 1 year), race, and sex who lived in the same neigh-

borhood was selected in order to match for socioeconomic status and neighborhood levels of ashfall. Cases were selected from among those patients who attended the ER during the four weeks following the May 18 eruption.

In the exposure-referent study, lists of all patients known to have attended therapeutic classes for asthma and chronic bronchitis (prior to the eruptions of 1980) were obtained from the Washington Lung Association. The experiences of residents of the ash-exposed communities of Yakima and Ellensburg were compared with those of residents from a referent (unaffected) rural community, to determine the extent to which volcanic ash exacerbated chronic lung problems for patients who may not have been seen at the surveillance hospital ERs.

All participants were interviewed in their homes by interviewers trained in the use of the questionnaire and in the selection of matched controls. The questionnaire was based on the British Medical Research Council Respiratory Symptom Questionnaire⁶⁶ which was extended to include questions on:

- o exposure to ash (time spent outdoors, involvement in house and community clean-up, wearing of masks, incidents when heavy exposure may have occurred);
- o onset and duration of respiratory symptoms before and after the May 18 ashfall, including visits to medical facilities and use of medications; and
- o housing information (location, number of rooms and occupants use of storm windows and doors, and type of home heating, cooking, and ventilation).

The results of these studies supported the *a priori* hypothesis that pre-existing chronic respiratory diseases (primarily asthma and chronic bronchitis) are important risk factors^{24,47} for adverse respiratory reactions⁵¹ to levels of TSP (largely volcanic ash) exceeding EPA's Emergency ($875 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and Significant Harm ($1000 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) NAAQ Standards (Figure 2). About one-third of the patients with chronic lung disease who were registered with the Lung Association stated that their respiratory problems had been worsened by volcanic ash exposure, and one-half of these patients were sufficiently affected so that they curtailed their usual activities for at least three months afterwards. It is likely that widespread adverse respiratory effects among people with chronic lung problems were averted to some

extent because most of these people had followed the official advice, issued through the media, to stay indoors and wear respiratory protection when exposure to volcanic ash could not be avoided.²⁴

It was not possible to use surveillance or case-control methods to evaluate the occurrence of new onset of asthmatic bronchitis in previously non-asthmatic individuals (which had been reported after the eruption of Soufriere volcano on St. Vincent⁶⁷). Valid, reliable, objective data on the preeruption clinical status (e.g., the severity of any pre-existing asthma⁴⁷ or asymptomatic bronchial hyperreactivity^{68,69}) and actual breathing-zone levels of respirable dust exposures were not available in either setting. Chapter 8 provides a review of several studies⁷⁰⁻⁷² which addressed this question with pulmonary function testing and environmental exposure measurements.

Loggers with Heavy/Prolonged Exposures

On June 4, 1980, the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) and the Weyerhaeuser Company (Weyco) made a joint request of Niosh for a Health Hazard Evaluation of the potential health risks for loggers from intense, frequent, or prolonged occupational exposures to volcanic ash. Prior to this request, Weyco industrial hygienists had collected and analyzed sedimented bulk and airborne respirable dusts in six ash-affected logging areas in Washington.⁷³

The Weyco industrial hygienists found that sedimented and resuspended dusts, including newly deposited volcanic ash, were highly respirable in size and contained 1 per cent to 5 per cent quartz and 1 per cent to 10 per cent cristobolite in the respirable fraction in logging areas affected by ashfalls. The results of air-sampling by Weyco were confirmed by NIOSH investigators: breathing-zone exposures for certain job categories of logging operation exceeded the $50 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ NIOSH-recommended exposure limit for free silica in a substantial portion of samples. As a result of these findings, NIOSH conducted a cross-sectional study of the respiratory status of the Weyco/IWA loggers in Washington and a comparison group of non-exposed loggers in Oregon which provided baseline data for a longitudinal follow-up.²⁷⁻²⁹ The results of the baseline and follow-up studies are described in detail in chapter 8.

Dissemination of Public Health Information

Immediately following the May 18 eruption, the news media, government authorities, and members of the public in areas affected by ashfalls sought information and advice about the health effects of volcanic ash from several different sources: local and state public health, environmental quality, and occupational health officials, as well as university affiliated and private practice physicians. There was wide-spread confusion and disagreement about certain common questions that had to be answered rapidly with valid and consistent responses. The questions asked most often concerned the necessity to remain indoors, the advisability of limiting outdoor exercise and sporting events, the risk of exposure for individuals with pre-existing lung disease, the need for respirators outdoors, and the use of automobiles.

Providing answers to these questions was difficult because of the paucity of directly relevant literature.^{1,2} This difficulty was compounded during the first days after the May 18 eruption by a lack of data regarding the concentrations of toxic substances in the ash, such as respirable-size crystalline free silica. Even weeks later, the wide variation in "silica" levels determined by different laboratory method hampered efforts to formulate consistent advice to the public. Finally, the potential duration of ash exposure could not be predicted

TABLE 6—Consensus Recommendations to the Public from the Oregon Public Health Committee on Volcanic Ash Fallout, Summer 1980

1	When airborne volcanic dust levels are high, avoid activities which would lead to dust exposure. Examples include jogging, lawn mowing, and dry clean-up of fallen ash.
2.	Persons who must work in dusty situations should wear a mask, recommended by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (coded by the designation, "TC-21-C"), for filtering out small ash particles. Goggles should be considered for eye protection as well.
3.	Remove fallen ash from your property by wetting it first to avoid raising unnecessary dust during clean-up.
4	Take caution to avoid motor vehicle accidents and falls caused by slippery or dusty conditions from wet volcanic ash.
5	If you have chronic lung or heart disease and experience an increase in symptoms, consult your physician.
6	Don't drive unnecessarily when conditions are dusty.
7	Avoid smoking. The hazards of smoking are far greater than any known to be caused by volcanic ash.

because no one could reliably predict how long the airborne concentration of respirable-size ash particles would remain elevated from a particular ashfall, or how long new ashfalls would continue to occur.

After the Presidential designation of the disaster area on May 21, 1980, FEMA established an interagency center for coordination of disaster response efforts, dissemination of scientific information, and control of rumors. The center was in Vancouver, Washington where the USGS volcano monitoring and state and local search and rescue operations were located. A NIOSH medical epidemiologist was assigned to work full time with USGS, USDS, and other federal, state, and local disaster response personnel at the FEMA coordinating center in Vancouver. Several other CDC professionals worked with state health department officials in Seattle, Washington and consulted with state officials in Portland, Oregon.

In Oregon, an ad hoc committee was eventually established to provide sound and consistent advice, in spite of early limitations on data concerning ash toxicity. This committee included representatives of state and local public health agencies, both private and university-based physicians, and concerned voluntary health organizations. The committee met to consider available data and to develop consensus recommendations for the public on health questions related to the ashfalls (which first affected the Portland area on June 12, 1980). These consensus recommendations, developed in cooperation with federal experts in the FEMA coordinating center, were then communicated to the media and the public (Table 6). This effort successfully reduced the earlier confusion that had resulted from separate, sometimes contradictory, recommendations issued by the various organizations with which committee members were affiliated.

By May 26, 1980, the FEMA Coordinator began publishing a series of Mount St. Helens Technical Information Network Bulletins. 54(1-33)) Field staff from CDC collaborated with FEMA on the health aspects of these bulletins and also published series of CDC Mount St. Helens Volcano Health Reports, initiated on May 30, 1981 and distributed nationally to state and country health officials. 14(1-23) These reports included technical advice on driving and vehicle maintenance in heavy ashfall areas; descriptive and analytical data on the occurrence and distribution of morbidity and mortality due to volcanic hazards; results of bulk ash analyses, area air

TABLE 7—Indices of Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Public Health Bulletins and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Technical Bulletins: Information Resources on the Evaluation and Control of Volcanic Hazards

Subject Area	CDC Report Numbers*	FEMA Report Numbers*
Disaster planning	4, 12, 14, 23	4, 25, 28, 34
Deaths, injuries near eruption	10, 15, 16, 19, 23	32
Public health aspects of volcanic eruptions, ashfalls	1-23	1-4, 10, 12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 26, 32
Socioeconomic aspects of volcanic eruptions, ashfalls	4, 9-11, 13, 14, 16-18, 20, 23	2b, 5-7, 9, 11, 16, 17, 21-24, 29-31
Collection, analysis of ash	3, 7-9, 12, 13, 16, 23	1, 8, 13, 32, 34
Monitoring and controlling ash, gas exposure in air/water/food	3, 4, 9-12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23	15, 18, 19, 26, 27, 30, 32
Literature review	8, 10, 13, 18, 21	33

*Copies of CDC reports¹⁴ may be available upon request to: Dr. Henry Falk, CDC/CEH/DEHHE, Atlanta, GA 30333, USA; request FEMA reports⁵⁵ from: Bill Brown, FEMA Region 10, Bothell, WA 98101, USA.

sampling, and personal exposure monitoring; results of water and food quality testing; updated descriptions of current and potential volcanic hazards; and guidelines for further predisaster planning and post-disaster responses, including control of flooding and resuspended ash in affected areas (Table 7). These FEMA and CDC publications provided health professionals and the public with valid, reliable, and timely information about the nature and impact of volcanic hazards and appropriate control measures. Federal, state, and local safety and health officials reported that these publications and daily news briefings at the FEMA Coordinating Center were extremely helpful.
74,75

Conclusions

Continuing volcanic activity at Mount St. Helens⁷⁶ and premonitory activity at other volcanoes in the northwestern United States⁷⁷ raise the remote, but serious, threat of further widespread environmental damage and the potential for widespread morbidity and mortality.⁷⁸ This chapter has outlined the range of public health concerns and the methods and actions involved in responding to the

explosive eruptions of a volcano in a relatively isolated area of western North America.

In developing countries, the human and technical resources available for disaster response efforts are considerably more limited. However, in the West Indies, Indonesia, Japan, and certain other areas, the magnitude and frequency of hazards from volcanic eruptions may rival those associated with other natural disasters which are somewhat more predictable (e.g., severe weather) or less predictable (e.g., earthquakes).^{34,79} Considering the expansion of world populations into potentially hazardous volcanic areas and current limitations in the reliability, precision, and availability of predictive monitoring technology, there is a growing need to develop appropriate pre-disaster planning and response measures. Resources for epidemiologic surveillance and epidemic field investigations of suspected outbreaks are needed following widespread environmental damage, mass evacuation, refugee resettlement, and disruption of routine public health services.³³⁻³⁸

It is hoped that the experiences following the eruptions of Mount St. Helens described here can serve as a case study in secondary preventive measures for use by populations which are more vulnerable and more often exposed to volcanic hazards.

Summary

A comprehensive epidemiological evaluation of mortality and short-term morbidity associated with explosive volcanic activity was carried out by the Centers for Disease Control in collaboration with affected state and local health departments, clinicians, and private institutions. Following the May 18, 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, a series of public health actions were rapidly instituted to develop accurate information about volcanic hazards and to recommend methods for prevention or control of adverse effects on safety and health. These *public health actions* included:

- o establishing a system of active surveillance of cause-specific emergency room (ER) visits and hospital admissions in affected and unaffected communities for comparison;
- o assessing the cause of death and factors associated with survival or death among persons located near the crater;
- o investigating reported excesses of ash-related adverse respiratory effects by epidemiological methods such as cross-sectional and

case-control studies; and

- o controlling rumors and disseminating accurate, timely information about volcanic hazards and recommended preventive or control measures by means of press briefings and health bulletins.

Surveillance and observational studies indicated that:

- o excesses in morbidity were limited to transient increases in ER visits and hospital admissions for traumatic injuries and respiratory problems (but not for communicable disease or mental health problems) which were associated in time, place, and person with exposures to volcanic ash;

- o excessive mortality due to suffocation (76 per cent), thermal injuries (12 per cent), or trauma (12 per cent) by ash and other volcanic hazards was directly proportional to the degree of environmental damage—that is, it was more pronounced among those persons (48/65, or about 74 per cent) who, at the time of the eruption, were residing, camping, or sightseeing (despite restrictions) or working (with permission) closer to the crater in areas affected by the explosive blast, pyroclastic and mud flows, and heavy ashfall; and

- o *de novo* appearance of ash-related asthma was not observed, but transient excesses in adverse respiratory effects occurred in two high-risk groups—hypersusceptibles (with preexisting asthma or chronic bronchitis) and heavily exposed workers.

Laboratory and field studies indicated that:

- o volcanic ash had mild to moderate fibrogenic potential, consisting of > 90 per cent (by count) respirable size particles which contained 4–7 per cent (by weight) crystalline free silica (SiO_2);

- o importantly, community exposures to resuspended ash only transiently exceeded health limits normally applied to entire working lifetime exposures to free silica; and

- o there were no excessive exposures to toxic metals, fibrous minerals, organic chemicals, radon, or toxic gases of volcanic origin in community water supplies or air.

Recommended preventive measures include: avoidance of areas of predicted hazards during premonitory and ongoing volcanic activity and use of respiratory protection and wetting methods to control unavoidable exposures to ash. In densely populated countries with relatively frequent explosive volcanic activity, resources for epi-

demiological surveillance and investigation are needed following widespread environmental damage, mass evacuation, refugee resettlement, and disruption of routine public health services.

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