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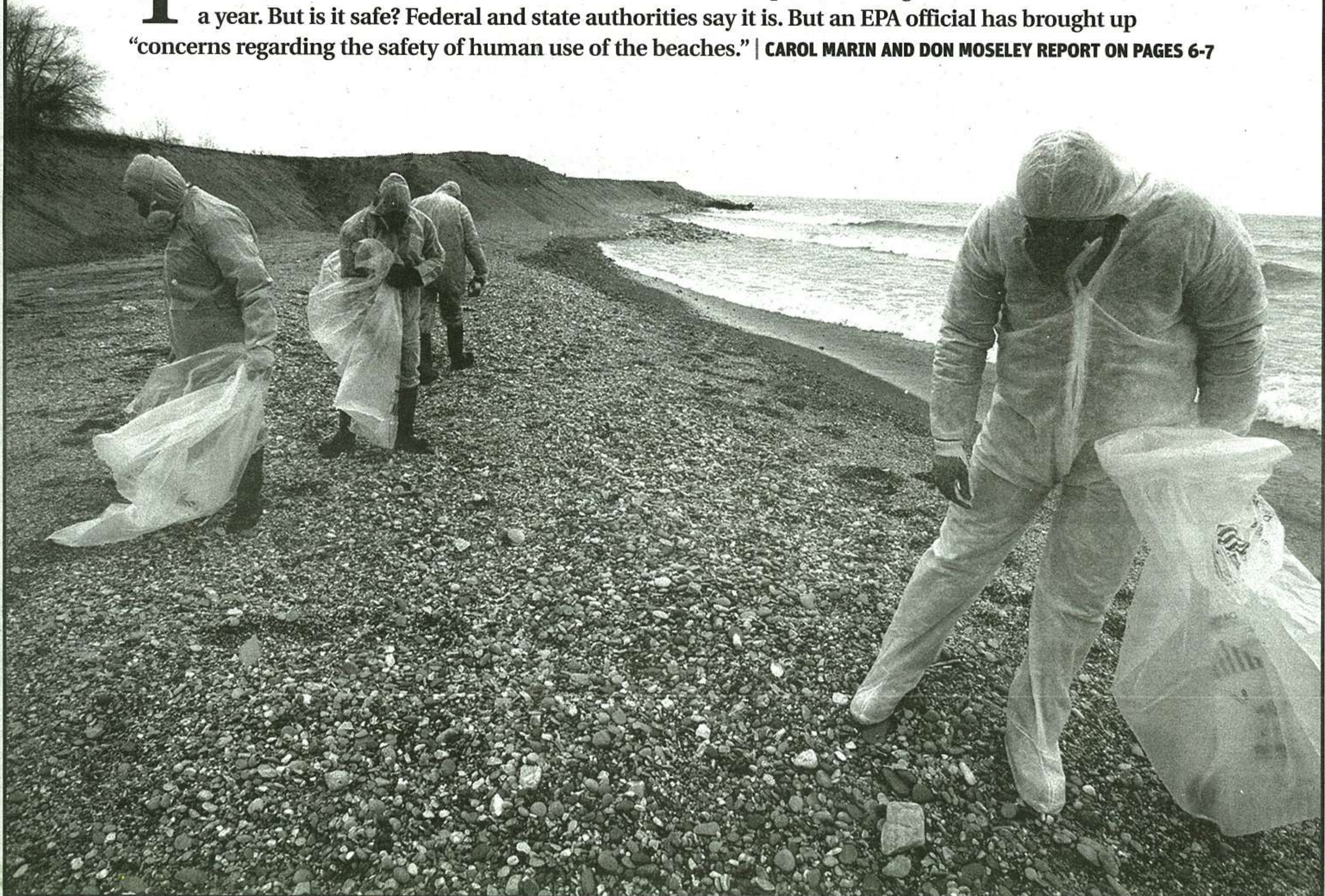
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| Let's get into it.

# OUR TOXIC BEACH

**T**his photo was taken nearly 10 years ago, when the Sun-Times first exposed asbestos pollution at Illinois Beach State Park. It's still the state's most-visited park, drawing 2 million to 3 million visitors a year. But is it safe? Federal and state authorities say it is. But an EPA official has brought up "concerns regarding the safety of human use of the beaches." | CAROL MARIN AND DON MOSELEY REPORT ON PAGES 6-7





# OUR SPOILED SHORE

CHICAGO  
SUN-TIMES



## INVESTIGATION | How safe is Illinois Beach State Park? EPA finds 'elevated' levels of most toxic form of asbestos

BY CAROL MARIN AND DON MOSELEY  
Sun-Times / NBC5

reminder of a problem that's marred the park for more than 10 years. Asbestos.

Nearly a decade ago, the Chicago Sun-Times first exposed asbestos pollution at the park near Zion. Now, according to a letter from a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official, "significantly elevated" levels of the most toxic form of the known carcinogen have been found there.

The far north suburban beach remains safe, federal and state authorities said in interviews. But an April 24, 2007, letter from an EPA official to a federal health official in Chicago raises concerns. In the letter, Brad Bradley, a U.S. EPA project manager, cites "concerns regarding the safety of human use of the beaches."

His letter came in response to tests last August by an arm of the

federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry used grading equipment on the beach so it could measure asbestos fibers churned up from the sand into the air. It found the most-toxic form of asbestos fibers — amphibole asbestos.

The mere presence of asbestos in sand or soil isn't considered a human health hazard. The danger is if

pieces are broken and asbestos particles get into the air. Asbestos can be deadly if inhaled, leading to a form of cancer.

"It is my understanding that we have found some amphibole asbestos in some of the air samples," Richard Karl, Superfund director for the EPA's regional office in Chicago, acknowledged in an interview.

Illinois Beach State Park is the state's most visited park. The pres-

ence of asbestos there is hardly a secret. Visitors are met with signs warning of asbestos-containing materials that have washed up and scattered along the beach.

But it's what's not visible — asbestos fibers embedded in the sand — that worries Jeff Camplin. In 2003, Camplin, who runs an asbestos-consulting firm, authored a report for the Illinois Dunesland Preservation Society.

"When you do disturb this sand, measurable, dangerous levels of toxic amphiboles are in the air," Camplin said in an interview. "If it was my choice, I would have the park shut down."

Paul Kakuris, president of the Illinois Dunesland Preservation Society, doesn't go that far. "We're not saying: Shut the park down," Kakuris said. "We are saying: Shut the beaches."

Asbestos at the park may come from a number of sources, according to federal and state authorities. Among them: the old Johns-Manville plant at the south end of the park, which, from the 1920s until 1985, manufactured products containing asbestos, including roofing materials. It's now a fenced-off EPA Superfund site. Other potential sources include demolished homes along the beach that were built with asbestos products and polluted sand dredged from the lake.

In studies in 1998, 2000 and last year, the state found small amounts of asbestos and concluded there was "minimal health risk."

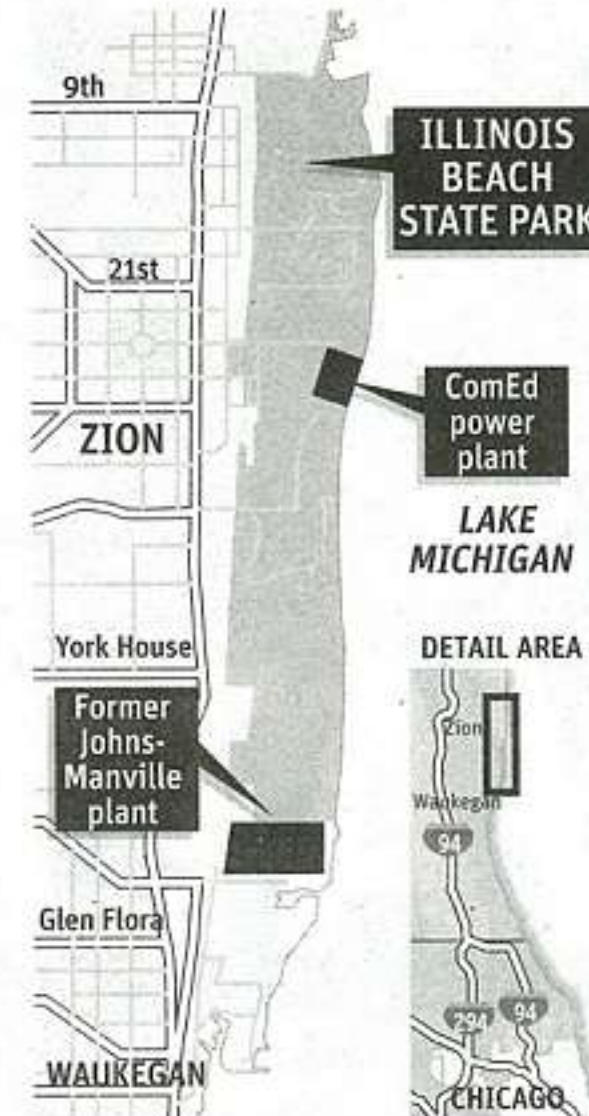
"I think it's fine," said Dr. Rosemary Sokas, an occupational physician and professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago who was part of a team of experts that did the state's 2006 study.

But in declaring the park safe, the government has relied on a test viewed by critics as outdated and is in the process of being revamped, the U.S. EPA acknowledged.

"The science associated with asbestos and the risk associated with [outdoor exposure to] asbestos isn't at the level we would like to see it," the EPA's Karl said.

The testing that led to the latest safety concerns was done last August by the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Its report said, in part: "Based on the bulk analysis of sand samples collected, the sand in [and] of itself does not appear to pose a significant source of asbestos fibers."

The EPA's Bradley responded "there might be a problem with this statement," noting, "air samples near the beach-grading



### ABOUT THE PARK

Illinois Beach State Park, outside Zion, is the state's most visited park.

- 4,160 acres
- 6.5 miles of Lake Michigan beachfront
- 2 million to 3 million visitors a year

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

equipment were significantly elevated.

"These inconsistencies in the actual air-monitoring results raise concerns regarding the safety of human use of the beaches," Bradley wrote.

Federal authorities have a review panel studying the test results.

For now, Sara Anderson, the Richmond mom, is aware of the asbestos concerns but not overly worried: "I'm making sure the kids are taking showers when they get home."

Still, she said, "It would be wonderful to make sure that it was all cleaned up and safe for everybody all the time."

Contributing: Dave McKinney



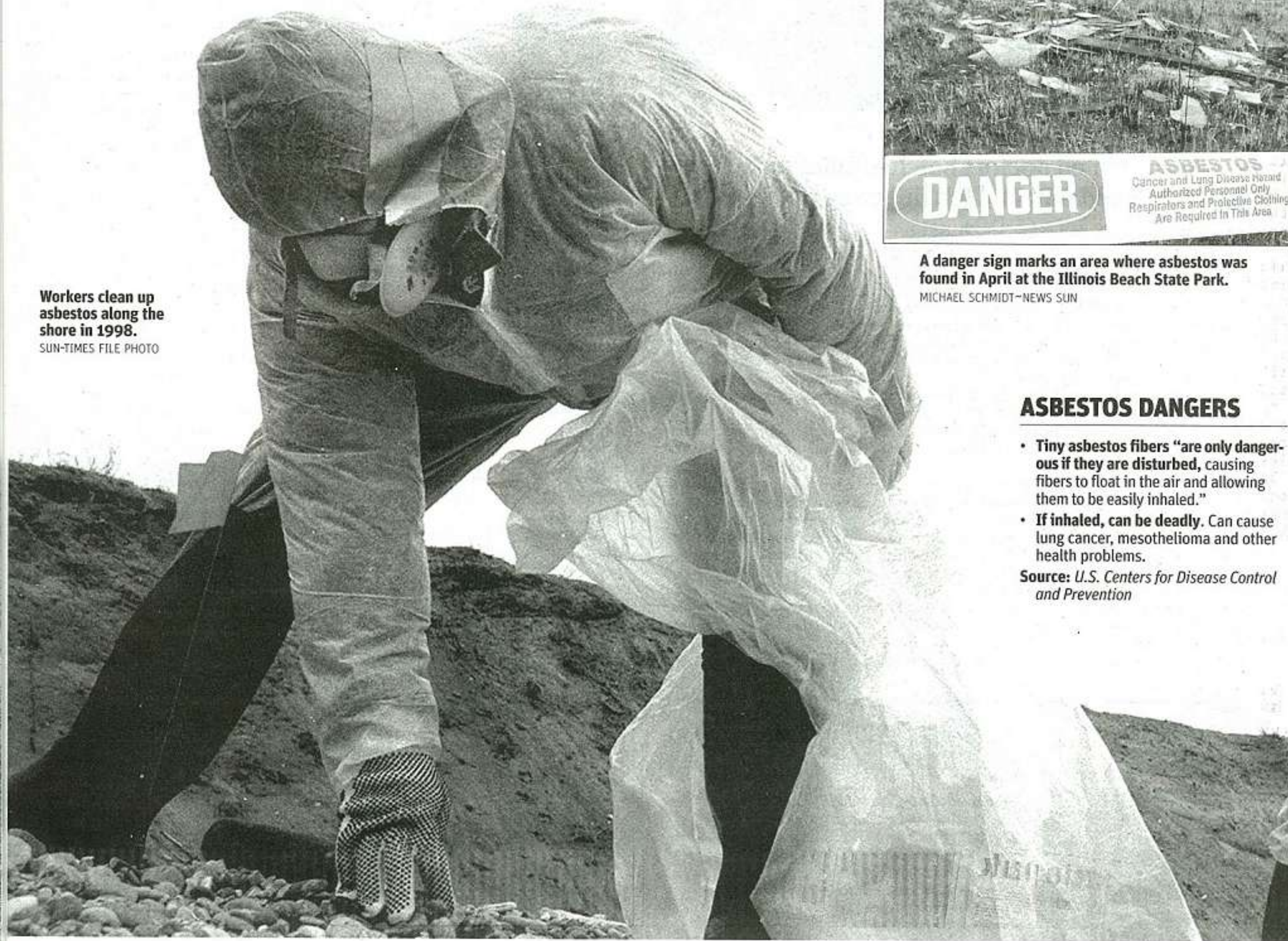
A danger sign marks an area where asbestos was found in April at the Illinois Beach State Park.

MICHAEL SCHMIDT-NEWS SUN

### ASBESTOS DANGERS

- **Tiny asbestos fibers** "are only dangerous if they are disturbed, causing fibers to float in the air and allowing them to be easily inhaled."
- **If inhaled, can be deadly.** Can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma and other health problems.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Workers clean up asbestos along the shore in 1998.  
SUN-TIMES FILE PHOTO

Sun-Times coverage of this issue from 1998.

