

'Off-roading' threat may lurk in the air

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(HealthDay)—Falls aren't the only danger for kids who ride an off-road vehicle. In many parts of the United States, riders may also inhale hazardous mineral fibers and toxic dust, researchers warn.

Four-wheel-drive and all-terrain vehicles "have been designed to operate in rugged, unpaved terrain, and they can produce copious amounts of [dust](#)," said study lead author Chris Wolfe.

Naturally occurring asbestos and other mineral fibers can become airborne in the dust generated while "off-roading," said Wolfe, an epidemiologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

"This puts riders—particularly children—at risk of inhalation exposure," he said in a hospital news release.

Most deposits of naturally occurring asbestos are situated along the Appalachian Mountains and ranges in the West and Southwest, particularly California, according to background notes with the study. Deposits of erionite, an asbestos-like material, are also found in sedimentary rocks in the West.

For the new study, researchers examined 15 previous studies investigating toxic mineral fibers and off-road vehicle use. The findings showed that many off-road vehicle trails are within 20 miles of these deposits. Dust from these trails can blow into other areas, the investigators noted.

The risks posed by these potentially harmful substances led the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to issue an emergency closure of a portion of California's Clear Creek Recreation Area in 2008.

This region contains the largest asbestos deposit in the nation, the researchers explained. They noted, however, that the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill to reopen the site for off-road vehicle use. The Senate has not yet approved the bill.

The study authors recommended avoiding areas with known hazardous

deposits. They also suggested wearing a mask and goggles to minimize exposure to toxic fibers while riding an off-road [vehicle](#).

More research is needed to investigate how many of the estimated 44 million Americans who engage in off-roading activities develop asbestos-related disease or other health issues as a result, the study authors said.

The study findings were recently published online in the *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*.

More information: The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration has more about [asbestos](#).

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