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August 3, 2015

Mr. Jack Requa
Interim General Manager and CEO
Washington Metro Area Transit Authority
600 5th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Requa:

Last week, many Washington-area residents, among them Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority employees, read press reports that roughly 280 operational Metro cars contain asbestos.

I urge WMATA to conduct a car-by-car inspection to assess the condition of all cars that may contain asbestos and to make a full public disclosure of the results.

Asbestos exposure is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide and up to 15,000 deaths in the U.S. annually, according to a recent estimate by the EWG Action Fund.

The Metro employees who work in the cars and the hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors who ride Metro trains each day have a right to know whether they may have been exposed to asbestos. Spokespeople for WMATA have been quoted as saying that asbestos in the system's cars was not disturbed and that public health is not at risk. But the only way to know for sure is for WMATA to have independent experts make a thorough examination of all cars that may contain this material and to make public the inspectors' findings. Furthermore, we urge WMATA to make public any additional records in its possession that show riders and employees are not at risk.

As I am sure you are aware, a number of industries, including railroads, once used asbestos for its heat- and fire-resistant properties. It is plausible that normal wear and tear and routine maintenance of Metro cars containing asbestos could have disturbed asbestos particles and sent them airborne.

If inhaled, asbestos fibers can cause fatal cancers and chronic lung diseases, including mesothelioma and asbestosis. The official guidance from the federal [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) says:

There is no "safe" level of asbestos exposure for any type of asbestos fiber. Asbestos exposures as short in duration as a few days have caused mesothelioma in humans. Every occupational exposure to asbestos can cause injury or disease; every

occupational exposure to asbestos contributes to the risk of getting an asbestos related disease.

We commend the WMATA for taking steps for the safe removal of asbestos as it works to decommission these cars, but the situation would not have been made public had the media not reported it.

I understand there are many challenges in operating a mass transit system as large as the D.C.-area Metro. However, the health and safety of those who maintain and operate the train and the trains' passengers must be WMATA's top priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather White". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heather White
Executive Director
EWG and EWG Action Fund.