Greg Meeker’s response (page 269, this issue) to my article “Asbestos Sans Mineralogy” (Elements 5: 141) provides much needed insight into ongoing asbestos issues (i.e. the unintended consequences of changes in mineral nomenclature). My intention in writing the article was to point out what I think should shock any mineralogist: mainly, a “new legal definition of asbestos” that did not include the word mineral, and the misuse of mineralogical nomenclature.

I stated that the vermiculite ore at Libby contains “trace” amounts of amphibole; Greg states that the Libby deposit contains “major” amounts of “fibrous amphiboles.” Greg has defined “trace” as less than 5% and “major” as greater than 25% (Meeker et al. 2003), and he showed that samples the USGS collected at the mine all contained amphiboles as a major component; but these samples were collected in amphibole-rich areas, not in vermiculite ore. From our work (Gunter et al. 2007), we showed that the amphibole content of products produced from the ore was less than 1%, and we also showed that only a portion of the amphiboles is asbestiform. Our unpublished results indicate that tailings contain around 5% amphiboles. We know that only a portion of the amphiboles is asbestiform. Our unpublished results indicate that tailings contain around 5% amphiboles. We know that only a portion of the amphiboles is asbestiform.

I stated that the Ban Asbestos bills would define asbestos as having an aspect ratio of 3:1 or greater. As might be guessed, there is more to this story. If you read these bills (House bill: www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s110-743; Senate bill: www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s110-690), you will see they refer to other documents to define asbestos, and if you track through all of them you end up with the definition being chrysotile, crocidolite, amosite, and the asbestiform habit of the minerals actinolite, anthophyllite, and tremolite. From Greg’s point of view, the “door was opened” to...