



Asbestos: What you should know

Asbestos is a mineral found in certain types of rock formations. When mined and processed, it takes the form of very small fibers, which are usually invisible to the naked eye. These fibers may become potentially dangerous when disturbed (asbestos fibers are not harmful unless they are damaged and separated). Disturbed asbestos material may release harmful fibers, which if inhaled can disrupt the normal functioning of the lungs. The fibers then can remain in the lungs for long periods of time, increasing the risk of disease. Some symptoms can occur even 20 years after exposure.

Three specific diseases are related directly to asbestos exposure: asbestosis, lung cancer and another form of cancer known as mesothelioma. The most severe health problems from asbestos diseases have been experienced by workers who held jobs in industries such as shipbuilding, where they were exposed to high levels of asbestos and worked directly with it on a regular basis. Today the most common cases are found in janitors, maintenance personnel, construction workers, insulators, plumbers, mechanics, telephone workers, electrical workers, firefighters and asbestos abatement workers. People who work, live or attend school in buildings containing asbestos products are also considered at risk for developing asbestos-associated diseases.

Asbestos became a commercial product in the early 1900s. Since that time it has been used in approximately 3,000 different products, including insulation and fireproofing materials. Asbestos became popular to use in these products because it is strong, won't burn, resists corrosion and is an excellent insulator. Asbestos was used in the past for insulation and can be found in houses built between 1930 and 1950. Asbestos also was used in shingles, millboard, textured paints and other coating materials, and floor tiles.

What to do if asbestos is found in your home:

- Don't panic! The best practice is to leave asbestos material that is in good condition untouched. Generally, material in good condition will not release asbestos fibers. There is no danger unless fibers are released and inhaled into the lungs.
- Check materials for damage regularly if you think it may contain asbestos. Look for wear and water damage.
- Keep activities to a minimum in areas having damaged materials that may contain asbestos fibers.
- Take every precaution to avoid damaging asbestos materials.
- Have removal and major repair performed by professionally trained contractors who are qualified in handling asbestos. Sweeping, sanding, scraping or drilling asbestos materials will disturb asbestos fibers.
- Refrain from using abrasive pads, brushes or power strippers to strip wax from asbestos flooring.
- Avoid tracking asbestos fibers through your home. If you cannot avoid walking through the infected area, have it cleaned with a wet mop. If the material is from a damaged area, or if a large area must be cleaned, call an asbestos-removal professional.

There are two types of corrections when managing asbestos repair and removal. Repair usually involves either sealing or covering asbestos material. Sealing is treating the material with a sealant that either binds the fibers together or coats the material so fibers cannot be released. Sealing is the most common repair for pipe, furnace and boiler insulation. Covering involves placing something over or around the asbestos containing material to prevent the release of fibers. Exposed insulated piping may be covered with a protective wrap or jacket.



Removal is the last and most expensive option. Removal may be required when remodeling or making changes to your home that may disturb the asbestos material. Removal is complex and must be done only by a contractor with special training. Improper removal will most likely increase health risks for you and your family.

Sources:

www.airquality.utah.gov/haps/asbestos/info/asinfo.htm

www.asbestostestinglab.com/where.html

www.epa.gov/iaq/asbestos.html

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