



# ASBESTOS IN THE WORKPLACE

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON THE DANGERS OF ASBESTOS FOR BUILDING OCCUPANTS

*Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral.* Asbestos is actually a name for a group of minerals with special characteristics that make it very useful because of its strength and resistance to fire and most chemicals. Based upon its useful characteristics asbestos was used in many building products in the United States from 1880 to about 1980.

## ***Where is asbestos found in buildings?***

Asbestos was used in a many building materials such as:

- Fire Retardants
- Electrical Insulation
- Joint Compound
- Cement Boards
- Thermal Insulation
- Pipe Insulation
- Plaster
- Joint Tape
- Siding
- Ceiling Tiles
- Boiler Jacketing
- Sheet Rock & Wall Board
- Roof Flashing & Other Roofing Materials
- Vinyl Flooring
- Carpeting Glues (or Mastics)

Asbestos can be found in building materials (other than wood, metal or glass) in structures built prior to 1980.

## ***What's the problem with asbestos?***

Asbestos would be the ideal building material if it were not the cause of multiple diseases. Few immediate health effects are associated with asbestos exposure; most asbestos related diseases manifest many years after exposure (15 to 40 years). The most serious diseases occur when asbestos fibers get into the air and are inhaled. Asbestos related diseases include **asbestosis** (the scarring of the lungs by the fibers), **lung cancer** and **mesothelioma** (a cancer of the lining around the lungs and heart, which is almost always fatal).

## ***Is it safe if asbestos is in the building where I work?***

If asbestos is managed properly it is safe to occupy a building with asbestos containing building materials. The primary concern with asbestos is when it gets into the air and is inhaled. Asbestos is the most dangerous when it is "**friable**"; or when it can be crushed or pulverized with hand pressure. Most ACMs, when in good condition and are left undisturbed, are not friable.

## ***How do I know if asbestos is in the building where I work?***

**Microscopic analysis** is the only way to determine if asbestos is present in building materials. Prudent practice assumes that any building material in buildings constructed prior to 1980 other than wood, metal or glass contains asbestos. Asbestos was widely used until 1980. Asbestos containing building materials purchased prior to 1980 were still used in construction well after 1980 and it is still used in some building materials made today. Only with laboratory analysis can a building owner be sure.

***Your employer should have records documenting what building materials contain asbestos. Those materials have to be labeled & workers who are likely to disturb those materials must be trained.***

***Is it safe for me to be in the building when asbestos is being removed?***

If the building owner follows all rules and regulations, it is safe to be in a building during asbestos removal. NYS Industrial Code Rule (ICR) 56 covers asbestos removal. Projects performed according to this regulation will prevent the release of asbestos fibers into the air outside the work enclosure. Building owners are required to **contain** the area and provide for **decontamination**. For large projects, **air sampling** is required inside and outside the project area to ensure building occupants are protected.

***How do I know if the people removing asbestos are qualified?***

Asbestos abatement personnel are required to carry their licenses on all projects and to post their licenses at the entrance to the work area during larger projects. To assure that the people performing asbestos removal do the work correctly, ICR 56 requires that both the employer and their employees must be licensed to perform the work by the NYS Department of Health.

***Who can I call if I have questions?***

You should always contact your CSEA Unit or Local Officers first. If they are not available, contact your Labor Relations Specialist (LRS) or your area Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Specialist. If you cannot reach them, contact the nearest Asbestos Control Bureau office.

The New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) Bureau asbestos regulation requires building owners to determine the presence, location and quantity of asbestos containing materials (ACMs) and presumed asbestos containing materials (PACMS) at the work site.

The regulations only consider materials to be ACMs if they contain more than 1% asbestos. The ACMs and PACMs must be labeled where it is practical to do so. They are also required to have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for every ACM and PACM.

*Materials like flooring are not required to be labeled, but building owners must post a sign to indicate where they are located.*

**For more information and resources visit:**

**[www.cseany.org/osh](http://www.cseany.org/osh)**



**Follow the CSEA Canary on:**



CSEA has been winning the fight for safe and healthy working conditions for over 100 years, yet there is more to be done. Hazards old and new- from Asbestos to Zika- remain a threat to workers every day. CSEA will not back down from the fight and nothing is more important than saving lives and keeping workers free from injury. Your help is needed now more than ever. The life you save could be **YOUR OWN**.

**SAVE A LIFE- NEVER QUIT!**

