

WORKING AROUND ASBESTOS

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON THE DANGERS OF ASBESTOS FOR HOUSEKEEPING & MAINTENANCE WORKERS

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.

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 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.

Any activity that can disturb ACM is forbidden by law unless performed by properly equipped personnel that are licensed by the NYS Department of Health.

NEVER DISTURB ASBESTOS!

Asbestos materials cannot be cut, sanded or drilled into unless proper containment is set-up and workers are properly licensed. It is forbidden to clean asbestos debris using compressed air, dry-sweeping or using a regular vacuum.

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.

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. 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.

Housekeeping and maintenance workers who work in areas that contain asbestos **MUST** be trained annually on:

- The health effects of asbestos.
- The presence and location of asbestos containing materials OR presumed asbestos containing materials.
- How to recognize if asbestos containing materials have been damaged or are deteriorating.

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.

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:

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