

ASBESTOS

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that can be positively identified only with a special type of microscope. There are several types of asbestos fibers. In the past, asbestos was added to many products to strengthen them and provide fire resistance and heat insulation. If disturbed, asbestos material may release asbestos fibers which can be inhaled into the lungs. Asbestos material that crumbles easily if handled or which has been scraped, sawed, or sanded into a powder is more likely to create a health hazard. Breathing high levels of asbestos fibers can lead to an increased risk of lung cancer, mesothelioma (cancer of lining of chest and abdominal cavity), and asbestosis (lungs scarred with the tissue). Houses built between 1930 and 1950 may have asbestos insulation. Most of today's products do not contain asbestos. If asbestos material is more than slightly damaged or you plan changes that might disturb it, you require a professional for repair and removal. Before home remodeling, find out if asbestos is present.

Excerpts from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "Asbestos and Vermiculite".

Asbestos FAQs

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral fiber. In the past, asbestos was added to a variety of products to strengthen them and to provide heat insulation and fire resistance.

How can asbestos affect my health?

From studies of people who were exposed to asbestos in factories and shipyards, we know that breathing high levels of asbestos fibers can lead to an increased risk of lung cancer.

Most people exposed to small amounts of asbestos, as we all are in our daily lives, do not develop health problems. However, if disturbed, asbestos material may release asbestos fibers, which can be inhaled into the lungs. The fibers can remain there for a long time, increasing the risk of disease.

Asbestos material that would crumble easily if handled, or that has been sawed, scraped, or sanded into a powder, is more likely to create a health hazard.

Where can I find asbestos and when can it be a problem?

Most products made today do not contain asbestos. Those few products made which still contain asbestos that could be inhaled are required to be labeled as such. However, until the 1970s, many types of building products and insulation materials used in homes contained asbestos.

Common products that may have been made with asbestos include insulation, soundproofing, decorative material sprayed on walls and ceilings, hot water and steam pipes, and furnace ducts.

What should be done about asbestos in the home?

If you think asbestos may be in your home, don't panic! Usually the best thing is to leave asbestos material that is in good condition alone, since material in good condition will not release asbestos fibers. There is no danger unless fibers are released and inhaled into the lungs.

If asbestos material is more than slightly damaged, or if you are going to make changes in your home that might disturb it, repair or removal by a professional is needed.

Asbestos professionals are trained in handling asbestos material. The type of professional will depend on the type of product and what needs to be done to correct the problem. You may hire a general asbestos contractor or, in some cases, a professional trained to handle specific products containing asbestos.

The federal government has training courses for asbestos professionals around the country. Some state and local governments also have or require training or certification courses. Ask asbestos professionals to document their completion of federal or state-approved training. Each person performing work in your home should provide proof of training and licensing in asbestos work, such as completion of EPA-approved training. State and local health departments or [EPA regional offices](#) may have listings of licensed professionals in your area.

The above information is provided as a public service by the Environmental Protection Agency for educational purposes.