

## Asbestos Awareness

Asbestos is a natural occurring mineral that was discovered to have excellent fiber strength and heat resistance. Because of these qualities, it has been used in a variety of building construction materials for insulation and as a fire retardant. Asbestos began being used in the 1940s after World War II. But since the early 1970s, it has become heavily regulated by many different agencies, including EPA, DOT, OSHA, and the state of Mississippi. Though the use of asbestos is heavily restricted, it is not completely banned in the United States and still use in some products today.

In general, exposure may occur only when the asbestos-containing material is disturbed or damaged in some way to release particles and fibers into the air. Asbestos exposure occurs from inhaling these tiny fibers. Exposure to asbestos increases your risk of developing lung disease. That risk is made worse by smoking. Health effects may not be apparent for 15 to 30 years or longer after the initial exposure. Asbestos exposure may cause lung cancer, mesothelioma (a rare form of cancer that is found in the thin lining of the lung, chest and the abdomen and heart) or asbestosis (a serious progressive, long-term, non-cancer disease of the lungs).

Many buildings built before 1980 contain asbestos in old floor tiles, ceiling tiles, roof shingles and flashing, siding, insulation (around boilers, ducts, pipes, sheeting, fireplaces), pipe cement, and joint compound used on seams between pieces of sheetrock. If you suspect material contains asbestos, don't touch it. Look for signs of wear or damage such as tears, abrasions, or water damage. Damaged material may release asbestos fibers. This is particularly true if you often disturb it by hitting, rubbing or handling, or if it is exposed to extreme vibration or air flow. Sealing, encapsulation, or covering with an enclosure may be a good solution for these damaged areas.

You cannot tell whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it. A trained asbestos professional should take samples for analysis. In fact, if done incorrectly, sampling can be more hazardous than leaving the material alone. Do not take samples yourself.

If you are going to make changes in a building that might disturb asbestos, repair or removal by a trained and accredited asbestos professional is needed.

If building materials aren't damaged and won't be disturbed, you do not need to have them tested for asbestos. Material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed (by remodeling, for example) should be left alone.

- ✓ Don't dust, sweep, or vacuum debris that may contain asbestos.
- ✓ Don't saw, sand, scrape, or drill holes in asbestos-containing materials.
- ✓ Don't use abrasive pads or brushes on power strippers to strip wax from asbestos flooring. Never use a power stripper on flooring that may contain asbestos.
- ✓ Don't sand or try to level asbestos flooring or its backing. When asbestos flooring needs replacing install new floor covering over it, if possible.