

Preventing Asbestos Exposure in the Home

Facts

- As the winter months arrive and people begin spending more time indoors, indoor air quality assumes increasing importance as a potential health concern. One health hazard associated with indoor air quality is the release of asbestos fibers during home renovation or remodeling activity.
- Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that easily breaks down into microscopic fibers. It has been used in literally thousands of different building materials and consumer products. Prior to the mid-1980s, asbestos-containing material (ACM) was widely used for home construction and remodeling. According to the federal Bureau of the Census, raw asbestos and ACM are still being imported into the U.S.
- When ACM is disturbed during remodeling or other activity, tiny fibers can be released to the surrounding air. If they are inhaled, they can become trapped in lung tissue. Asbestos can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and another form of cancer called mesothelioma, which affects the lining around the lung; it can take up to 30 years for these diseases to develop.
- There is no known "safe" level of asbestos exposure, so it's important to protect yourself and your family during any demolition or remodeling activities in your home.

Safe Behavior

- Identifying materials that contain asbestos is the first step in protecting yourself. Unless you have product label information available, there isn't any way to tell whether a particular product or material contains asbestos. You can assume the material contains asbestos, or have a sample of the material analyzed by an approved laboratory to determine if it contains asbestos.
- Asbestos is only a hazard if the ACM is damaged or disturbed and the fibers are released into the air. In some cases, the best course is to repair or encapsulate the damaged material, using encapsulants or other appropriate materials. Check with a hardware or safety supply store to find out which materials can be used to encapsulate ACM.
- Homeowners may remove ACM from their own single family home that they reside in. However, if someone else, like a contractor, is hired to remove or encapsulate certain ACM and the amount is greater than 10 linear feet, six square feet or one cubic foot, the contractor must be licensed by MDH. Contractors make use of techniques and engineering procedures that are not available to the homeowner. They also collect air samples while the work is in progress, and within the work area after the project is done. These air samples determine if the air meets the indoor air standard, that assures the area is safe to be re-occupied.

Additional Materials

These and other fact sheets are available on MDH's Web site or by calling MDH.

- [Asbestos in Minnesota Homes](#)
- [Asbestos and Its Health Effects](#)
- [Products Which May Contain Asbestos](#)
- [Floor Covering Removal](#)
- [Roofing and Siding Removal](#)
- [Hiring a Contractor](#)

- [Healthy Homes](#)

Contact

- Minnesota Department of Health
Asbestos Program
Phone: 651-201-4620
Web site: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/asbestos/house/index.html