

Fact Sheet

Asbestos: Yesterday and Today

Asbestos Mining

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral that was/is mined all over the world. According to the United States Geological Survey, historical asbestos producing and prospective mines, and natural occurrences of asbestos can be found in 913 locations across the country. California, Arizona, North Carolina, and Vermont had the largest asbestos mining operations in the country. Following increasing evidence of the harmful effects of asbestos on human health, asbestos production began to decrease with the last producing mine in the United States closing in 2002 in California.

Asbestos Regulations

In the 1970's, the Environmental Protection Agency banned spray-applied asbestos for any purpose as well as the installation of asbestos pipe insulation on facility components such as boilers and hot water tanks. Also banned were the use of asbestos in artificial fireplace embers and wall patching compounds. Methods of application that resulted in friable (easily crumbled) asbestos after drying was banned too during the 1970's. In 1989, the Environmental Protection Agency issued a ban on most asbestos-containing products. In 1991, the regulation was overturned in a New Orleans Court of Appeals. Uses established prior to the ban were re-instated with a ban remaining on flooring felt, rollboard, some specialty papers, and products not previously containing asbestos. Due to this overturned regulation, many products containing asbestos are still manufactured in the United States

from imported asbestos. The United States Geological Survey estimates more than 2.3 million pounds of asbestos was imported into the U.S. in 2012.



Asbestos Health Concerns

All forms of asbestos are known to be human carcinogens and can cause both cancer and respiratory diseases.

Asbestos is virtually invisible, odorless, and tasteless. Both friable and non-friable asbestos pose health risks, however friable asbestos is more easily dispersed into the air where the fibers can be inhaled or ingested. Asbestos fibers that become trapped deep in the lungs or digestive tract can cause health problems. Asbestos related illnesses include asbestosis (chronic lung disease), mesothelioma (fatal cancer of lung lining), lung cancer, gastrointestinal cancer, and pleural effusion (fluid around the lungs). Symptoms may not appear for 20 to 50 years after initial exposures. Shortness of breath, wheezing, persistent coughing with or without blood, difficulty swallowing, fatigue, swelling of face and neck, chest tightness and anemia are just some of the symptoms of asbestos-related respiratory illnesses. According to the Environmental Working Group, 10,000 people die each year from asbestos related illnesses; that's an average of 30 deaths per day.

The University of Northern Iowa and the Iowa Waste Reduction Center are an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Asbestos In New Products

Materials containing asbestos can still be purchased in many stores throughout North America today. Checking labels can help identify when asbestos is present in new materials. Asbestos occurs in two forms, serpentine and amphibole. The serpentine form contains fibers that are curly. The only serpentine asbestos member is called chrysotile. Amphibole fibers are needle-like and consist of the following members: amosite, crocidolite, tremolite, anthophyllite, actinolite, anthophyllite, richterite, and winchite. The list below includes products that may still contain asbestos and are available new for purchase today. Information on new products that may contain asbestos is available at: <http://www.asbestos.com/products/>

Vinyl sheet flooring
Vinyl floor tiles
Asphalt floor tiles
Flooring backing
Roofing shingles
Cement wallboard
Acoustical plaster
Decorative plaster
Boiler insulation

Electrical wiring insulation
Electrical panel partitions
Caulking
Spackling
Adhesives
Chalkboards
Cement siding
Cement piped
Heating and electrical ducts

Fire blankets
Fire doors
High temperature gaskets
Elevator rake shoes
Elevator equipment panels
Ceiling tiles
Electrical clothe
Thermal paper products

Asbestos In Homes and Buildings

Asbestos can be found in many products in homes and buildings. Renovation projects, demolitions, and deconstruction projects should be managed with asbestos in mind. Prior to any projects, suspect materials should be tested for asbestos fibers by an accredited laboratory. The National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program has a list of accredited asbestos laboratories and can be located at the following link:

<http://ts.nist.gov/Standards/scopes/plmtm.htm>

Items in the home that may contain asbestos includes roofing and shingles, insulation, textured paint, patching compounds on walls and ceiling joints, stove-top pads (pot holders), walls and floors around wood burning stoves, vinyl flooring, hot water and steam pipes, oil and coal furnace gaskets, window glazing, and ceiling tiles (to name a few). Even popcorn poppers, toasters, textiles, and some toys were made with asbestos. There is no safe amount of asbestos. If in doubt, treat the materials as if it contains asbestos until an inspection or laboratory test can verify concerns. If asbestos is present, proceed with a certified and permitted asbestos contractor. The Iowa Division of Labor Services lists all asbestos licensed and permitted companies authorized to work in the state of Iowa at the following link:

<http://www.iowaworkforce.org/labor/asbestos.htm>

It is illegal to work without a license!

The Iowa DNR requires notification of asbestos demolition and/or renovation projects to be mailed and postmarked to them at least 10 days before beginning a project. For more information on asbestos, please visit the Iowa Department of Natural Resource's Air Quality Bureau at the following link:

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/InsideDNR/RegulatoryAir/Asbestos.aspx>

