



ASBESTOS FACT SHEET

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that has been used commonly in a variety of building materials for insulation and as a fire-retardant. Today, asbestos is most commonly found in older homes, in pipe and furnace insulation materials, asbestos shingles, millboard, textured paints and other coating materials, and floor tiles.

How dangerous is asbestos exposure?

The most dangerous asbestos fibers are too small to be visible. After they are inhaled, they can remain and accumulate in the lungs. Asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma (a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings), and asbestosis (irreversible lung scarring that can be fatal). Symptoms of these diseases do not show up until many years after exposure began.

How do you become exposed to asbestos?

Elevated concentrations of airborne asbestos can occur after asbestos-containing materials are disturbed by cutting, sanding or other remodeling activities. Improper attempts to remove these materials can release asbestos fibers into the air in homes, increasing asbestos levels and endangering people living in those homes. Most people with asbestos-related diseases were exposed to elevated concentrations on the job, while some developed disease from exposure to clothing and equipment brought home from job sites.

How do I reduce my risk of being exposed to asbestos?

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

Do not cut, rip, or sand asbestos-containing materials – Leave undamaged materials alone and, to the extent possible, prevent them from being damaged, disturbed, or touched. Periodically inspect for damage or deterioration. Discard damaged or worn asbestos gloves, stove-top pads, or ironing board covers.

When you need to remove or clean up asbestos, use a professionally training contractor – 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. Before you have your house remodeled, find out whether asbestos materials are actually present. Select a contractor only after careful discussion of the problems in your home and steps the contractor will take to clean up or remove them. Consider the option of sealing off the materials instead of moving them.

You can call the EPA's TSCA assistance line (202) 554-1404 to get a listing of your stat's certified asbestos removal contractors, and for information on EPA's asbestos programs.

How can I find out more about asbestos?

If your home is located in Alexandria, yo can call the Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services/Division of Environmental Quality at (703) 838-4334

For other information, you can contact the Indoor Air Quality Clearinghouse at 1-800-438-4318.