

STATE OF COLORADO

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Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado

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Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ASBESTOS

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a number of naturally occurring minerals that have been mined for their useful properties such as thermal insulation, chemical and thermal stability, and high tensile strength. The types of asbestos that are regulated are: Chrysotile, Amosite, Crocidolite, Anthophyllite, Tremolite, and Actinolite. Asbestos deposits can be found throughout the world and are still mined in Australia, Canada, South Africa, and the former Soviet Union.

Why is Asbestos a hazard?

Asbestos is made up of microscopic bundles of fibers that may become airborne when distributed. These fibers get into the air and may become inhaled into the lungs, where they may cause significant health problems. Researchers still have not determined a "safe level" of exposure but we know the greater and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of contracting an asbestos-related disease. Some of these health problems include:

- **Asbestosis** - a lung disease that causes scarring of the lungs. Eventually, this scarring may become so severe that the lungs cannot function. The latency period (meaning the time it takes for the disease to become developed) is often 25-40 years.
- **Mesothelioma** - a cancer of the lining of the lung and chest and/or the lining of the abdominal wall. This form of cancer is peculiar because the only known cause is from asbestos exposure. The latency period for mesothelioma is often 15-50 years.
- **Lung Cancer** – can be caused by asbestos. The effects of lung cancer are often greatly increased by cigarette smoking (by about 50%). Cancer of the gastrointestinal tract can also be caused by asbestos. The latency period for cancer is often 15-30 years.

Despite the common misconception, asbestos does not cause headaches, sore muscles or other immediate symptoms. As mentioned above, the effects often go unnoticed for 15-50 years.

When is Asbestos a hazard?

Asbestos is not always an immediate hazard. In fact, if asbestos can be maintained in good condition, it is recommended that it be left alone and periodic surveillance performed to monitor its condition. It is only when asbestos-containing materials (ACM) are disturbed or the materials become damaged that it becomes a hazard. When the materials become damaged, the fibers separate and may then become airborne. In the asbestos industry, the term '**friable**' is used to describe asbestos that can be reduced to dust by hand pressure. '**Non-friable**' means asbestos that is too hard to be reduced to dust by hand. Machine grinding, sanding and dry-buffing are ways of causing non-friable materials to become friable.

Where Can Asbestos Be Found?

Asbestos is commonly used as an acoustic insulator, thermal insulation, fire proofing and in other building materials. Asbestos fibers are incredibly strong and have properties that make them resistant to heat. Many products are in use today that contain asbestos. Most of these are materials used in heat and acoustic insulation, fireproofing, and roofing and flooring. Some of the more common products that may contain asbestos include:

Acoustical Plaster	Decorative Plaster	Joint Compounds
Adhesives and Mastics	Ductwork Flexible Fabric Connections	Laboratory Gloves
Asphalt Floor Tile	Electric Wiring Insulation	Laboratory Hoods/Table Tops
Base Flashing	Electrical Cloth	Packing Materials (for wall/floor penetrations)
Blown-in Insulation	Electrical Panel Partitions	Pipe Insulation (corrugated air-cell, block, etc.)
Boiler Insulation	Elevator Brake Shoes	Roofing Felt
Breaching Insulation	Elevator Equipment Panels	Roofing Shingles
Carpet Backings	Fire Blankets	Spackling Compounds
Caulking/Putties	Fire Curtains	Spray-Applied Insulation
Ceiling Tiles and Lay-in Panels	Fire Doors	Taping Compounds (thermal)
Cement Pipes	Fireproofing Materials	Textured Paints/Coatings
Cement Siding	Flooring Backing	Thermal Paper Products
Cement Wallboard	Heating and Electrical Ducts	Vinyl Floor Tile
Chalkboards	High Temperature Gaskets	Vinyl Sheet Flooring
Construction Mastics (floor tile, carpet, ceiling tile, etc.)	High Temperature Paper Products	Vinyl Wall Coverings
Cooling Towers	HVAC Duct Insulation	Wallboard

Wasn't Asbestos Banned?

EPA has found that there are rather common misunderstandings about its 1989 bans on asbestos-containing materials (ACM) and products or uses. Newspaper and magazine articles, Internet information, even some currently available (but outdated) documents from the EPA and other federal agencies may contain statements about an EPA asbestos ban that are incorrect. In fact, in 1991 the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated much of the so-called "Asbestos Ban and Phaseout" rule and remanded it to the EPA. Thus, much of the original 1989 EPA ban on the U.S. manufacturing, importation, processing, or distribution in commerce of many asbestos-containing product categories was set aside and did not take effect. Six asbestos-containing product categories are still subject to the 1989 asbestos ban. However, EPA has no existing bans on most other asbestos-containing products or uses.

EPA does NOT track the manufacture, processing, or distribution in commerce of asbestos-containing products. It would be prudent for a consumer or other buyer to inquire as to the presence of asbestos in particular products. Possible sources of that information would include inquiring of the dealer/supplier or manufacturer, refer to the product's "Material Safety Data Sheet" (MSDS), or consider having the material tested by a qualified laboratory for the presence of asbestos.

For More Information, please contact:

Asbestos Compliance Assistance Group

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