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Asbestos

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ASBESTOS

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What Is Asbestos?

Until about 1980, asbestos was widely used in building materials to give strength, increase heat insulation, and provide fire resistance.

Health Effects of Asbestos

When asbestos products get old, they can become crumbly and disperse tiny fibers into the air. If you breathe asbestos particles over time, they can accumulate in your lungs and lead to serious respiratory problems, including asbestosis (a chronic, progressive lung disease caused by prolonged inhalation of asbestos particles), cancer and other lung diseases.

Sources of Asbestos

It was used in roof and siding shingles, floor tiles, soundproofing and fireproofing materials, insulation around pipes, heating ducts and flues, textured ceilings, and decorative finishes.

- steam pipes, boilers, and furnace ducts wrapped for thermal insulation
- resilient floor tiles and sheet flooring (vinyl asbestos)
- cement sheets, millboard, and other materials used to insulate around furnaces, fireplaces and woodstoves
- soundproofing and decorative materials sprayed on walls and ceilings
- textured paints and patching and joint compounds
- roofing and siding shingles (asbestos cement)
- artificial ashes and embers
- consumer products needing insulation (such as ironing board covers and stove top pads)

Detection of Asbestos

Asbestos-containing materials generally cannot be recognized by sight; therefore, identification by special testing is needed.

Reducing Asbestos Problems

If the material is in good condition: **leave it alone!**

Before beginning any remodeling work, have a laboratory test done to confirm or deny the presence of asbestos in suspicious materials. Call your local health department for procedures of obtaining a sample. If materials are damaged or disintegrating:

- Seal or encapsulate - use a sealant to bind materials together, or coat the material so fibers cannot be released
- Cover or enclose - cover the asbestos-containing materials so fibers cannot be released
- Do not cut, tear, sand, saw, drill, or scrape asbestos-containing materials unless absolutely necessary, and then only after taking full safety precautions.

Safety Precautions for Asbestos

Here are some general guidelines for how a trained professional works with asbestos-containing materials. Do not attempt to remove asbestos-containing materials without proper training.

1. Seal off room. Do not let children, pets, or other household members into the area; post a warning sign.
2. Shut down heating or cooling systems. Avoids distribution of fumes, fibers, or dust.
3. Keep dust and fibers in the work area. Use disposable plastic floor and shoe coverings.
4. Wear a respirator and protective gear. Wear disposable protective coverup and gloves.
5. Wet asbestos-containing materials with a solution of water and detergent (about one teaspoon detergent to one quart water). Use a hand sprayer.
6. Avoiding handling, breaking and cutting materials .
7. Dispose of contaminated debris properly. Encase all asbestos-containing debris in two layers of plastic for disposal; follow local requirements for proper disposal.
8. Do not eat or drink in the work area.
9. Thoroughly wet clean the removal area. Vacuum using a special cleaner with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter and wet clean again.
10. Families with young children or pregnant women should move out of the house during major remodeling if asbestos hazards are present ore being removed.

If removal of asbestos-containing materials is necessary, use a trained and certified professional. For more information, call your local county health department (you can find the phone number in your local phone directory under your county name or the government section), contact the State Department of Health at (801) 538-6101, or contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

*Sources: Healthy Indoor Air for America's Homes (3rd ed.), Hidden Environmental Hazards for the Home Remodeler Instructional Module; and Home*A*Sys: An Environmental Risk-Assessment Guide for the Home. Funding for this brochure from Healthy Indoor Air for America's Homes: CSREES, EPA, MSU.*

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