

# Protect Your Family from Asbestos

## How to Identify Materials That May Contain Asbestos

Generally, you can't tell whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it, unless it is labeled. If in doubt, treat the material as if it contains asbestos and leave it alone. You may want to have your home inspected for asbestos-containing materials by a trained and accredited asbestos professional if:

You are planning to remodel your home (remodeling can disturb building materials)

Your home has damaged building materials (like crumbling drywall and insulation that is falling apart)

A trained and accredited asbestos professional should take samples for analysis, since a professional knows what to look for, and because there may be an increased health risk if fibers are released. In fact, if done incorrectly, sampling can be more hazardous than leaving the material alone. Taking samples yourself is not recommended.

If building materials in your home aren't damaged and won't be disturbed, you do not need to have your home tested for asbestos. Material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed (by remodeling, for example) should be left alone.

See common products that may contain asbestos

## What to Do If You Have Asbestos in Your Home

If you think there may be asbestos in your home, don't panic.

Asbestos-containing materials that aren't damaged or disturbed are not likely to pose a health risk. Usually the best thing is to leave asbestos-containing material alone if it is in good condition.

Generally, asbestos-containing material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed (by remodeling, for example) will not release asbestos fibers.

Asbestos-containing materials may release fibers when they are disturbed, damaged, removed improperly, repaired, cut, torn, sanded, sawed, drilled or scraped. Keep an eye on asbestos-containing materials and visually check them over time for signs of wear or damage.

If you suspect material contains asbestos, don't touch it. Look for signs of wear or damage such as tears, abrasions, or water damage. Damaged material may release asbestos fibers. This is particularly true if you often disturb it by hitting, rubbing or handling, or if it is exposed to extreme vibration or air flow.

For slightly damaged asbestos-containing material, sometimes the best way to deal with it is to limit access to the area and not to touch or disturb it. If asbestos-containing 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 trained and accredited asbestos professional is needed.

## Asbestos Do's and Don'ts for the Homeowner

Do leave undamaged asbestos-containing materials alone.

Do keep activities to a minimum in any areas having damaged material that may contain asbestos, including limiting children's access to any materials that may contain asbestos.

Do take every precaution to avoid damaging asbestos-containing material.  
Do have removal and major repair done by people trained and qualified in handling asbestos. It is highly recommended that sampling and minor repair also be done by a trained and accredited asbestos professional.  
Don't dust, sweep, or vacuum debris that may contain asbestos.  
Don't saw, sand, scrape, or drill holes in asbestos-containing materials.  
Don't use abrasive pads or brushes on power strippers to strip wax from asbestos flooring. Never use a power stripper on flooring that may contain asbestos.  
Don't sand or try to level asbestos flooring or its backing. When asbestos flooring needs replacing install new floor covering over it, if possible.  
Don't track material that could contain asbestos through the house. If you cannot avoid walking through the area, have it cleaned with a wet mop. If the material is from a damaged area or if a large area must be cleaned, call an asbestos professional.

#### If You Have an Asbestos Problem

If the asbestos-containing material is more than slightly damaged or could be disturbed, there are two types of actions that can be taken by trained and accredited asbestos professionals: repair and removal.

Repair usually involves either sealing or covering asbestos material. With any type of repair, the asbestos remains in place.

Sealing (encapsulation) involves treating the material with a sealant that either binds the asbestos fibers together or coats the material so fibers are not released. Pipe, furnace and boiler insulation can sometimes be repaired this way. This should be done only by a professional trained to handle asbestos safely.

Covering (enclosure) involves placing something over or around the material that contains asbestos to prevent release of fibers. Exposed insulated piping may be covered with a protective wrap or jacket.

Removal may be required when remodeling or making major changes to your home will disturb asbestos-containing material. Also, removal may be called for if asbestos-containing material is damaged extensively and cannot be otherwise repaired. Removal is complex and must be done only by a trained and accredited asbestos professional. Improper removal may actually increase your and your family's exposure to asbestos fibers.

#### Asbestos Professionals: Who Are They and What Can They Do?

In general, there are two main types of accredited asbestos professionals that can be hired to handle asbestos-containing material:

**Asbestos Inspectors.** These individuals can inspect a home or building, assess conditions, take samples of suspected materials for testing, and advise about what corrections are needed. If repair or removal of asbestos materials is chosen, inspectors can ensure the corrective-action contractor has followed proper procedures, including proper clean up, and can monitor the air to ensure no increase of asbestos fibers.

**Asbestos Contractors.** These professionals can repair or remove asbestos materials. Federal law does not require persons who inspect, repair or remove asbestos-containing materials in detached single-family homes to be trained and accredited;

however, some states and localities do require this. For safety, homeowners should ensure that workers they hire to handle asbestos are trained and accredited. State agencies have the most up-to-date listings of accredited professionals in your area.

#### Before You Hire an Asbestos Professional

Avoid a conflict of interest. An asbestos professional hired to assess the need for asbestos repair or removal should not be connected with an asbestos firm that does the actual repair or removal of materials. It is better to use two different firms so there is no conflict of interest.

Ask asbestos professionals to document their completion of federal- or state-approved training. Each person performing work should provide proof of accreditation to do asbestos work.

Check on the past performance of your asbestos professional with your local air pollution control board, the local agency responsible for worker safety, and the Better Business Bureau. Ask if the firm has had any safety violations. Find out if there are legal actions filed against it.

#### If You Hire an Asbestos Professional Inspector

Make sure that the inspection will include a complete visual examination and the careful collection and laboratory analysis of samples.

If asbestos is present, the inspector should provide a written evaluation describing its location and extent of damage and give recommendations for correction or prevention. The inspector may recommend and perform checks after the correction to assure the area has been properly cleaned.

#### If You Hire an Asbestos Professional Contractor

Before work begins, get a written contract specifying the work plan, cleanup, and the applicable federal, state, and local regulations which the contractor must follow (such as notification requirements, removal, handling and disposal procedures). Check with state agencies and asbestos worker protection laws to learn about federal, state, and local laws.

At the end of the job, get written assurance from the contractor that all procedures have been followed.

Ensure the contractor follows these procedures:

Avoids spreading or tracking asbestos dust into other areas of your home.

Disposes of all materials, disposable equipment and clothing used in the job in sealed, leak-proof, and labeled heavy-duty plastic bags. The work site should be visually free of dust and debris.

Upon completion, clean the entire area thoroughly with wet mops, wet rags, sponges, or HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) vacuum cleaners. A regular vacuum cleaner should never be used.

Does not break removed material into small pieces. This could release asbestos fibers into the air.

Applies a wetting agent to the asbestos material with a hand sprayer that creates a fine mist before removal. Wet fibers do not float in the air as easily as dry fibers and will be easier to clean up.

Ensures the work site is clearly marked as a hazard area. Do not allow household members and pets into the area until work is completed.

Seals the work area from the rest of the house using plastic sheeting and duct tape, and turns off the heating and air conditioning system. For some repairs, such as pipe insulation removal, plastic glove bags may be adequate. They must be sealed with tape and properly disposed of when the job is complete.

After the work is complete, an inspector or an independent air testing contractor may perform air monitoring to make sure there is no increase of asbestos fibers in the air which may be necessary to assure that the contractor's job was done properly.