

What you need to know about **ASBESTOS** but were afraid to ask

Asbestos – what is it and why might I have it?

An abundant and naturally occurring mineral fiber, asbestos has long been used in construction materials. Because of its unique property to withstand heat or chemicals, asbestos has been widely used as an insulation material and as a fire retarder. Additionally, it has been used in cement products, ceiling and flooring materials, paint and a multitude of other products. Asbestos is still being so widely used that it can be safe to say that every building contains asbestos in some form or another.

Wait, “still being used?” Wasn’t asbestos banned a long time ago?

Well, first yes and later, no. In 1989, the EPA banned the US manufacturing, importation, processing or distribution of many asbestos-containing materials / products (ACM). Two years later, much of the original "Asbestos Ban and Phase out" rule was set aside by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. In fact, currently the following items are the only items specifically banned by the EPA’s Toxic Substances Control Act or the Clean Air Act:

- Most spray-applied ACM surfacing;
- Sprayed-on application of materials containing more than 1% asbestos to buildings, structures, pipes, and conduits unless the material is encapsulated with a bituminous or resinous binder during spraying and the materials are not friable after drying;
- Wet-applied and pre-formed asbestos pipe insulation and pre-formed asbestos block insulation on boilers and hot water tanks;
- Corrugated paper, roll board, commercial paper, specialty paper, flooring felt and new uses of asbestos.

The following list includes those construction items no longer banned:

- Asbestos-cement corrugated sheet, asbestos-cement flat sheet, vinyl-asbestos floor tile, asbestos-cement shingle, and millboard;
- Asbestos clothing;
- Asbestos-cement pipe and pipeline wrap;
- Non-roofing coatings, roofing felt, and roof coatings.

So where might asbestos be in my building?

The good news is that many of the companies today that make construction products have voluntarily stopped incorporating asbestos in their manufacturing process. However, up until the late 1970’s asbestos use was fairly widespread. The following list comprises some common uses of asbestos:

- Steam pipes, boilers, and furnace ducts can be insulated with an asbestos blanket or asbestos paper tape;

- Resilient floor tiles (vinyl asbestos, asphalt, and rubber), or the backing on vinyl sheet flooring and adhesives used for installing floor tile;
- Cement board, millboard, and paper used as insulation around furnaces and wood burning stoves;
- Door gaskets in furnaces, wood stoves, and coal stoves;
- Soundproofing or decorative material sprayed on walls and ceilings;
- Patching and joint compounds for walls and ceilings, and textured paints;
- Asbestos cement roofing shingles and siding.

How can I be sure if I have asbestos?

The problem with asbestos containing materials (ACM) is that there is no way for the naked eye to confirm whether it contains asbestos or not. There is only one way to determine if you have an ACM, the material should be sampled and analyzed by a qualified professional. Don't try to take a sample yourself because, if you do it incorrectly, there may be an increased health risk from fibers that could be released during its removal. Call a professional!

I have asbestos, now what?

First and foremost, don't panic. If you have determined that there are ACMs in your building and they are in good shape and not going to be disturbed – there is no need to do anything. Asbestos fibers enter the air when materials are damaged, flaking, dusting or disturbed.

If the ACMs are damaged in any way or you need to disturb them, you can either repair or remove the ACM.

Repairing the ACM usually involves encapsulating / sealing or enclosing / covering it. Either way, repairs should only be performed by a licensed and trained asbestos repair contractor.

Removing the ACM is a very complicated process that, again, should only be handled by a licensed and trained asbestos removal contractor.

For more information about asbestos, refer to "A Consumer Guide to Asbestos" published by the California State License Board. You can locate it at:

<http://www.cslb.ca.gov/Resources/GuidesAndPamphlets/AsbestosGuideForConsumers.pdf>

The information provided herein is meant to be instructional and to assist the consumer in dealing with asbestos. The information in this publication is believed to be accurate at the time of its publication. Carter Construction assumes no responsibility for any damage that arises from any action that is based on information found in this publication.

Questions regarding civil law and the civil courts system should be addressed to an attorney.