



Asbestos

Information Sheet

Scientific Background

Asbestos is the name given to a number of naturally occurring fibrous silicate minerals that have been mined for their useful properties such as thermal insulation, chemical and thermal stability, and high tensile strength. Asbestos can only be identified under a microscope.



Asbestos is made up of microscopic bundles of long-thin fibers that may become airborne when disturbed. If inhaled into the lungs, these fibers can cause significant health problems. There is no specific "safe level" of exposure, but the greater and longer the exposure, the greater the risk of contracting asbestos related disease. No studies are available regarding short-term exposure.

Reference: <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>

Discovery



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. 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. Non-friable materials, such as transite siding and floor tiles are not regulated provided it does not become friable. Machine grinding, sanding and dry-buffing are ways of causing non-friable materials to become friable.

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 or have it sampled and analyzed by a qualified professional. A 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 you nevertheless choose to take the samples yourself, take care not to release asbestos fibers into the air or onto yourself.

For professional asbestos testing and removal: 404-562-9197 Regional Asbestos Coordinator

Fixing the Problem



- Do keep activities to a minimum in any areas having damaged material that may contain asbestos.
- Do take every precaution to avoid damaging asbestos material.
- Do have removal and major repair done by people trained and qualified in handling asbestos.
- Don't dust, sweep, or vacuum debris that may contain asbestos. Remove dust by wet mopping or with a special HEPA vacuum cleaner used by trained asbestos contractors.
- Don't saw, sand, scrape, or drill holes in asbestos materials.
- Don't use abrasive pads or brushes on power strippers to strip wax from asbestos flooring. Never use a power stripper on a dry floor.
- 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.