

Asbestos Information

Asbestos is a group of natural minerals made of tiny fibres. It was used before 1990 in building materials to help with insulation, fire safety and strength.

Asbestos can be harmful when disturbed because it releases fibres that people can breathe in. The fibres are too small to see. Only trained lab workers using microscopes can tell if a material has asbestos.

Health effects

- Breathing in fibres can cause serious health problems over time, including:
- [Asbestosis](#) (scars on the lungs)
- Mesothelioma (cancer of tissues lining the lungs and other organs)
- Cancer of the lungs, larynx (voice box) and ovaries

The diseases usually take years to develop.

People who breathe in more asbestos over a longer time, such as workers who handle asbestos materials, have a higher chance of getting an asbestos-related disease.

Building materials

Asbestos may be found in some [building materials](#) used **before 1990**, including:

- Drywall mud
- Ceiling tiles
- Insulation
- Floor tiles
- Textured wall or ceiling finishes

There is very little risk from these materials if:

- The building was built after the early 1990s.
- The materials with asbestos are in good condition and likely won't be disturbed or damaged.

Safety

Take the following safety precautions with asbestos:

- Do not disturb building materials that might contain asbestos. If the materials are in good condition and won't be moved or broken (for example, they are sealed behind walls or in the attic), they are not a health risk.

- For buildings built before the early 1990s, hire an [environmental consultant](#) to test materials that might contain asbestos **before** starting any renovations.
- Hire a qualified contractor to remove asbestos. They have the right personal protective equipment and know how to do the work safely.

Public buildings

Building owners can do a building survey to find if any asbestos-containing materials in a public building.

If the survey finds asbestos and it isn't being removed, the building owner can make an asbestos management plan to protect people in the building.

For more information about asbestos in public buildings (including workplaces), see the Alberta [Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual](#) or ask an [occupational health and safety expert](#).

After a fire or flood

Fires and floods can damage asbestos-containing materials, releasing harmful fibres into the air. The cleanup after a fire or flood can also disturb asbestos.

Private homes

If your home has fire or flood damage and you have insurance, ask your insurance company to help you find an environmental consultant. They can check for asbestos and advise you on safe asbestos removal.

If asbestos is found, it's safest to have a qualified contractor remove it. But if you choose to do the work yourself, you can lower your risk of harm:

- Keep materials that may contain asbestos intact (whole)
- Don't use power tools or sanders on materials with asbestos.
- Keep materials wet so asbestos fibres don't get into the air.
- Seal asbestos waste in a thick plastic bag right away.
- Wear personal protective equipment to help lower your risk of asbestos exposure, including:
 - A half-mask air respirator with a P100, R100, or N100 filter. They protect better than N95 respirators.
 - Disposable coveralls, booties, and gloves. Take them off after exiting the home and throw them out with the asbestos waste.

If you think you have disturbed asbestos-containing materials, do the following right away:

- Wet the materials and seal them in plastic bags.
- Wipe all surfaces with a disposable wet cloth.

Check with your city, town or county about how to safely dispose of building materials that may contain asbestos.

Learn more about returning to your home after a [wildfire](#) or a [flood](#).

Public buildings

If a public building — like a daycare, salon or restaurant — has fire or flood damage, the building may need to be checked for asbestos. This is important if the building was built before the mid- 1990s **and** damaged materials could contain asbestos. The building owner should hire an environmental consultant to check for asbestos. If asbestos is found, a qualified contractor should remove it.

Learn more about reopening a business after a [wildfire](#) or [flood](#) (see “At Your Business”).

Related to asbestos

[Asbestos and your health](#) – Health Canada

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at [ahs.ca/eph](#).

PUB-1093-202508

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