

ASBESTOS FACTS

What is asbestos? Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fiber. It can be found in about 3000 different kinds of materials, where it was used mainly for its fireproofing and insulating qualities and for its exceptional tensile strength.

Is asbestos harmful? Breathing asbestos fibers can cause asbestosis (scarring of the lungs), mesothelioma (cancer of the lung lining), and lung cancer. However, the hazard exists only when asbestos-containing materials are damaged or deteriorated to the extent that they release microscopically small fibers into the air we breathe.

How can I recognize asbestos? Many materials could contain asbestos, but prime suspects are construction materials made from the 1940s through the 1970s, such as pipe and boiler insulation, fireproofing, floor and ceiling tiles, cement siding, surfacing materials, and roofing. The only way to verify the presence of asbestos, though, is to have the material sampled and analyzed by a qualified laboratory.

What should I do about asbestos? Asbestos materials that are in good shape may simply be left alone and protected from disturbance. However, if the material is damaged, it should be either repaired or removed by qualified professionals. Proper removal methods include adequate wetting and containment, followed by thorough cleanup with a specialized asbestos vacuum and proper disposal at an approved landfill in labeled, leak-tight bags.

How safe are public buildings? It depends. Older buildings (pre-1980) are more likely to contain asbestos materials, but if the materials are in good shape and not being disturbed, they're not releasing hazardous asbestos fibers. An asbestos survey is advisable for any public building, and if renovation or demolition is planned, a survey is required.

How safe are our schools? All schools must have their buildings checked for asbestos. If any is found, a qualified professional must prepare a written plan for dealing with it. Schools must also train a designated person in asbestos management and train maintenance workers in asbestos awareness.

What laws apply to homeowners? Division inspectors are not authorized to enforce asbestos regulations on homeowners (or their contractors). However, homeowners should be aware that asbestos wastes must be properly packaged and buried at a landfill approved by the Division of Waste Management. Additionally, the Labor Cabinet requires contractors who remove asbestos in homes to protect their employees by using safe removal methods. Finally, homeowners who endanger their neighbors by mishandling asbestos could be liable for damages under civil law.

What if I suspect a problem? If you are concerned about possible asbestos hazards in a public building, you should ask the building owner or superintendent about it. In a school building, you should discuss the situation with the school's asbestos designee, who is identified in the asbestos plan located in the school office. For asbestos concerns at home, you should contact a qualified asbestos professional (lists of these asbestos professionals are available on our website at <http://air.ky.gov/Pages/TrainingandCertificationInformationandAsbestosContacts.aspx>).