



Asbestos Awareness

Asbestos is a mineral fiber mined from natural deposits. The most common form of asbestos used in construction is Chrysotile, a whitish mineral fiber. Other types used include Amosite (used in elbows and around boilers) and Crocidolite. In construction, Asbestos was used prominently in fire protection, insulation, wrapping of boilers, hot water and steam pipes, textiles, plaster, ceiling tile, floor tile, siding, and roofing materials. Asbestos was a popular building material because of its natural fire retardant properties. Asbestos is found in the majority of buildings built or remodeled between 1930 and 1976 such as schools, hospitals, offices, and homes. It is most dangerous when disturbed, sending microscopic fibers into the air to be inhaled by workers.

Materials are considered to be ACM (Asbestos Containing Materials) when they contain more than 1% of asbestos fiber by weight and shall be handled in accordance with applicable OSHA and EPA standards. Employees who suspect that ACM is present shall notify their Supervisor immediately. The Safety Director or other person competent in the recognition of Asbestos shall inspect the suspect ACM material. If the material is found to be ACM, work will cease in that area immediately and the property owner notified.

Diseases related to asbestos exposure include:

- Asbestosis – scarring of lung tissue that may become so severe that the lungs are unable to get enough oxygen to the bloodstream and vital organs. Symptoms include coughing, shortness of breath and a tightness or pain in the chest. Causes of death include heart failure, respiratory infections or the later development of lung cancer.
- Lung Cancer – malignant tumors may grow in the lungs. Symptoms include cough or change in cough habit and chest pain.
- Pleural Mesothelioma – malignant tumors may grow in the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity. Symptoms include shortness of breath, pain in the chest wall, weight loss and cough. Death usually occurs one year after diagnosis.
- Gastrointestinal Cancer – tumors may grow in parts of the digestive tract, esophagus, stomach, colon or pancreas.

Risks of getting asbestos-related diseases depend upon the following:

- Level of asbestos exposure (primary consideration)
- Length of asbestos exposure
- Smoking habits (smokers are more susceptible than non-smokers)

SAFETY REMINDER

You only have one set of lungs – if it might be asbestos, notify your supervisor.