

Asbestos

Asbestos - In the Home

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When is asbestos a hazard?

Asbestos is a hazard to health when the fibers are disturbed and become airborne. This means that asbestos poses health risks **only when fibres are present in the air and then people breathe them into the lungs**. Fibres can be released into the air when asbestos-containing products break down. This release can happen through deterioration or when the material is cut or disturbed.

What is covered in this document?

This document is part of a series of documents on asbestos:

- [Asbestos - What is...](#)
- [Asbestos - Health Effects](#)
- [Asbestos - Control Strategies for Workplaces](#)
- **Asbestos - In the Home**

What should I do if I think there is asbestos in my house?

Health Canada provides the following recommendations for homeowners who may have asbestos in their house:

"You can reduce your risk of exposure by hiring a professional to test for asbestos before doing any:

- renovations or remodelling
- demolitions
- additions

If asbestos is found, hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to get rid of it before beginning work. Avoid disturbing asbestos materials yourself. This increases the risk to your health and your family's health. Check with your provincial and territorial workplace safety authorities to find out the qualifications or certifications needed in your area.

If you have vermiculite-based insulation in your attic, it may contain asbestos. To avoid exposure to asbestos fibres, do not disturb vermiculite-based attic insulation in any way or attempt to remove it yourself. Make sure:

- children are not allowed in the attic
- the attic is not used for storage or any other use
- professionals that are trained to handle asbestos are hired if you plan to remodel or renovate
- all cracks and holes in the ceiling of the rooms below the insulation are sealed
- caulking around light fixtures and the attic hatch is applied to prevent insulation from falling through

If you have vermiculite-based insulation in your attic, some may have fallen inside your walls over time. Therefore, you should seal cracks and holes with caulking around:

- window and door frames
- along baseboards
- around electrical outlets"

From: [Health risks of asbestos](#), Government of Canada

Where can asbestos be found in the home?

You cannot tell if a product contains asbestos just by looking at it. The only way to tell is to have it tested by a laboratory.

Is asbestos always a hazard?

No, not always. Products in good condition (not deteriorating, etc.) may not be releasing fibres. If a material shows signs of damage such as tears, cracks or water damage, talk to a professional consultant. When examining the product, don't touch it as you may unintentionally release fibres into the air.

Asbestos fibres can be released into the air in homes when:

- Disturbing loose-fill vermiculite insulation which may contain asbestos.
- Removing deteriorating roofing shingles and siding containing asbestos, or tampering with roofing felt that contains asbestos.
- Ripping away old asbestos insulation from around a hot water tank.
- Sanding or scraping vinyl asbestos floor tiles.
- Breaking apart acoustical ceilings tiles containing asbestos.
- Sanding plaster containing asbestos, or sanding or disturbing acoustical plaster that gives ceilings and walls a soft, textured look.
- Sanding or scraping older water-based asbestos coatings such as roofing compounds, spackling, sealants, paint, putty, caulking or drywall.
- Sawing, drilling or smoothing rough edges of new or old asbestos materials.

Can I remove asbestos from my home myself?

No, you should not. Asbestos fibres can easily become air borne, creating a risk of serious illness if proper precautions are not taken.

If you suspect there might be asbestos containing material and before renovations can take place, the product or material must be tested. If there is asbestos is present, proper procedures must be used before the material can be disturbed (removed, or cut).

In many areas, there are strict regulations that define the procedures that must be used when working with different types of asbestos. Even if the work is to be done outdoors, these requirements must be followed.

For example, in Ontario, any worker that is involved in an asbestos abatement project must have received proper training. If the worker is involved in a [type 3 operation](#), the worker must have received training that is approved by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Can I paint or encapsulate the asbestos myself?

It is not recommended that asbestos products be painted. Painting over the insulation (e.g., when wrapped around pipes) is not a method of encapsulation. The paint may seal the product somewhat, but it may not prevent the insulation from becoming friable (broken into smaller pieces).

In addition, the 'act' of painting or trying to encapsulate the asbestos by other methods may loosen asbestos fibres which then can become air borne.

If there is concern about the asbestos product, it is recommended that it be removed safely or encapsulated by a professional contractor.

What should I do?

The best step is to hire a professional contractor or consultant familiar with asbestos removal. When hiring, confirm that they are qualified and have insurance that covers the type of asbestos work they will be completing.

The person you hire should discuss the specific steps that must be taken to prepare the work area to make sure that:

- The dust is controlled.
 - The right personal protective clothing and equipment is used.
 - There is appropriate clean up of the work area and waste removal.
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Does CCOHS offer asbestos contracting or removal services?

No. CCOHS does not offer any services related to asbestos testing, identification or removal.

CCOHS does not maintain or have a list of asbestos removal contractors. Please check the Yellow pages in your phone book or use the Internet to find a contractor in your area. When hiring, confirm they are qualified and have insurance that covers the type of asbestos work they will be completing.

Where can I get more information?

More information is available from:

- HiddenKiller.ca website from WorkSafe BC
 - WorkSafe BC For Homeowners - [Asbestos Hazards When Renovating Older Homes](#)
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(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others of which you may be aware.)

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