

ASBESTOS

Information for Home Buyers, Home Sellers and Realtors

Even if asbestos is in a home, it is usually not a serious problem. The mere presence of asbestos in a home or building is not hazardous. Asbestos material in good condition is not a health issue if left alone. The problem with asbestos, however, is that the material may become harmful over time. Disturbing any amount of asbestos containing material (ACM) can create a health hazard where none previously existed. Damaged material may release asbestos fibers into the air and when inhaled become a health hazard.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that has been used in over 3,000 products. It can only be positively identified with a special type of microscope. Asbestos fibers have been added to products to strengthen, to provide heat insulation and fire resistance. There are two general forms of asbestos: friable and non-friable. Friable asbestos can be crumbled, pulverized or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry and it is the most dangerous form. Non-friable asbestos cannot be easily pulverized or reduced to a powder.

Where can asbestos be found?

Most products today do not contain asbestos. Until the 1970's, many types of building products and insulation materials used in homes contained asbestos. Some of the products that may have contained asbestos are listed below:

- Insulating blankets or paper tape used for steam pipes, boilers and furnace ducts
- Resilient floor tiles, adhesives and mastic used to install floor tiles
- Cement sheets, millboards and paper used as insulation around furnaces and wood burning stoves
- Door gaskets in furnaces, wood and coal stoves
- Soundproofing or decorative material sprayed on walls and ceilings
- Patching and joint compound for walls and ceilings and textured paints
- Roof cement shingles and cement siding
- Artificial ashes and embers used in gas fireplaces
- Older household products: fireproof gloves, ironing board covers....
- Automobile brake pads, linings, clutch facings and gaskets

What are the health concerns?

Most people who are exposed to small amounts of asbestos do not develop health problems. The risk increases with the number of fibers inhaled. Asbestos materials that crumble easily or have been sawed, scraped or sanded into powder (friable ACM), are more likely to create a health problem.

Asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma (cancer of the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity) or asbestosis (lungs become scarred with fibrous tissue). The symptoms to these diseases usually do not appear until 20-30 years after the first exposure to asbestos.

How do you identify “ACM”?

Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM) cannot be positively identified visually. They must be analyzed in a laboratory to be positively identified. If you are in doubt that a material contains asbestos, have it sampled and analyzed by a certified individual or company.

Do not touch, remove, scrape, sand, drill, saw, cut, tear or damage materials, which may contain asbestos fibers!

What should be done about asbestos in a home?

If the presence of ACM is suspected in a home and if the material is in good condition, the best response is to leave it alone. The material should be regularly checked by looking for signs of wear and tear, disturbance, or water damage. If ACM is exposed or is likely to be disturbed by accidental contact, then ACM should be removed or repaired.

Removal

Homeowners may remove asbestos in their primary residence themselves without obtaining permit and without notifying the state of their activities. It is strongly recommended that they use a certified asbestos contractor to minimize the risk of releasing asbestos fibers into the home.

Repair

Encapsulation (sealing) involves treating the material with a sealant that either binds the asbestos fibers together, or coats the material so fibers cannot be released.

Enclosure (covering) involves installing an airtight, permanent barrier around asbestos containing building materials, to prevent the release of fibers into the air.

For further information, contact the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division at 303-692-3150 or visit their website at www.cdphe.state.co.us

Call us with any questions you may have!

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