

# Asbestos Hazards in Older Homes

The EPA estimates that most of the nation's 107,000 schools and nearly 750,000 public and commercial buildings contain some asbestos. While asbestos is still used in many construction materials, the larger concern with asbestos lies in the aging schools and public buildings and in older homes – those that were built before 1980.

In public schools and buildings, asbestos containing materials are, by federal regulation, carefully monitored and inventoried. Your older home probably did not come with an inventory of all asbestos containing materials, but if the house in which you live was built before 1980, there's a good chance that you'll find asbestos containing materials in the walls, ceiling, roof or floors – or all of the above.

Disturbing or damaging asbestos containing materials in your home can expose you to asbestos dust and fibers, which are dangerous carcinogens. If your home has asbestos in it, you can easily release asbestos fibers inadvertently doing common home repairs, remodeling and renovations. Recognizing asbestos containing materials can help you avoid disturbing asbestos and exposing yourself and your family to the risk of mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis.

## Common Household Products That May Contain Asbestos

Until the 1970s and into the early 1980s, many products used in home building and repair contained asbestos. There were also many common household products that contained asbestos. This is a list of some of the most common asbestos containing products that you may find in your home.

- **Heating System Insulation:** Steam pipes, furnace ducts and boilers may be insulated with asbestos paper tape or an asbestos blanket. If the tape or blanket is damaged, repaired or removed without precautions, asbestos fibers may be released. Contact a licensed professional to remove or repair heating systems properly.
- **Resilient floor tiles, vinyl flooring and floor mastics/adhesives:** Many flooring products were made with asbestos. Most commonly, vinyl flooring tiles and sheet flooring contained asbestos, as did the mastic or adhesive used to affix it to the sub-floor. Do not sand, scrape or tear up floors without determining if they contain asbestos.
- **Millboard, cement sheet or asbestos paper insulating stoves and furnaces:** Asbestos was often used as insulation around wood burning stoves and furnaces. Removing appliances or repairing them may release asbestos fibers, as will cutting, sanding, drilling, tearing or otherwise damaging insulation. Contact a professional to have the appliance removed or repaired.
- **Soundproofing or Decorative plaster on walls or ceilings:** Acoustical paints, popcorn paint and other decorative textured paints often contained asbestos. If the material is loose, damaged by water or can be crumbled with hand pressure, it may release asbestos fibers. Sanding, scraping or drilling the paint or material may also release asbestos dust. In many cases, it is better to encapsulate the asbestos than to remove it. Contact a professional asbestos remover to find out all your options.
- **Patching and Joint Compounds used for walls and ceilings:** Wallboards and the patching and joint compounds used with wallboards often contained asbestos. Punching through walls, tearing down walls, scraping, sanding or drilling through joint compounds or textured paints may all release asbestos fibers.

*More on back...*



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### **Where Asbestos May Be Found in the Home**

There are also common places where you may find asbestos in older homes. Those include:

- roofing tiles made of asbestos cement
- asbestos cement siding
- insulation
- textured paint on ceilings and walls in houses built before 1978
- patching compound used on wall and ceiling joints before 1978
- older stove top pads and trivets
- artificial embers or ashes for gas-fires
- vinyl floor tiles
- the backing on vinyl sheet flooring
- asbestos paper or tape around heating pipes and hot water pipes
- furnace insulation and door gaskets

### **How to Identify Asbestos in Your Home**

Unfortunately, identifying asbestos isn't often as easy as looking for a label or brand name. Many of the products that were made with asbestos look no different than similar products that did not contain asbestos. The only way that you can know for sure whether a material contains asbestos is to have it analyzed by a qualified professional.

An asbestos professional will usually take samples of suspected asbestos containing materials for analysis. You should not take samples yourself because there is a risk of releasing asbestos fibers when you do so. A professional will follow specific precautions to avoid the possibility of asbestos release.

### **What to Do if You Find Asbestos in your Home**

First of all, don't panic if you think there are materials in your home that contain asbestos. In most cases, as long as the material is in good condition your best course of action is to leave it alone. Inspect it regularly for damage or wear, and if it shows signs of damage, contact a licensed and trained contractor for advice. Your options will be:

**Repair** by sealing or covering the asbestos containing material

**Contain** by encapsulating the asbestos containing material. Encapsulation involves sealing the material with a coating that either binds the asbestos fibers or coats it so that asbestos fibers aren't released.

**Enclosing** the asbestos containing material is done by covering or wrapping the asbestos material with another material.

All of the above should be done by an asbestos abatement professional. In most cases, removing the asbestos will be far more expensive than repairing it. It may make it more difficult to remove the asbestos if it's required later, though.

If you opt to have asbestos removed rather than repaired, it is paramount that the work be done by a licensed, trained asbestos professional. Improper removal of asbestos containing materials increases the risk of exposure for you and your family.

If in doubt about whether a material contains asbestos, it is safest to have it tested, or to treat it as if it does.

For more information, please visit the ASBESTOS AND MESOTHELIOMA CENTER, [www.asbestos.com](http://www.asbestos.com)