

Asbestos in Older Homes

Asbestos has been a growing concern for city governments and the owners of public buildings for some time. In recent years, concerns about asbestos have become a growing issue among the owners of single family homes. These are some of the questions most commonly asked of asbestos abatement companies by the owners of private homes, and their best answers.

1. How likely is my home to contain asbestos?

If your home was built after 1980, the chances that it contains asbestos or any materials that have asbestos added to them is very small. If your home was built or underwent major renovations between World War I and 1980, there's a very good chance that there are materials in your home that contain asbestos.

2. How dangerous is asbestos in my home?

While asbestos is a known carcinogen, it is only dangerous in the form of tiny airborne fibers. Asbestos is a mineral that easily separates into tiny fibers that are light enough to float in the air. Those fibers were often mixed into things like paint, cement and wood pulp to help make them fire resistant and increase their insulating properties. As long as those materials are in good repair, the chance of them releasing asbestos fibers is very small, and there is little health risk in living with them.



3. Why is asbestos dangerous?

Breathing in asbestos fibers increases your risk of developing lung cancer, causes asbestosis – scarring of the lungs – and may lead to the development of mesothelioma, a rare cancer that is only found in people who were exposed to asbestos. For additional resources on [asbestos cancer](#) or [mesothelioma treatment](#) please see the resources at [Asbestos.com](#)

4. When is asbestos dangerous to me or my family?

Asbestos containing materials can become dangerous to your family's health when they are damaged or disturbed enough to release fibers of asbestos into the air.

5. How can I tell if something in my home contains asbestos?

The only way to know for sure that a material in your home contains asbestos is to have it examined by a professional. It's nearly impossible to identify asbestos by visual examination alone unless you have the experience and knowledge to identify specific brands and types of materials by sight. Even then, most professionals rely on a microscopic examination to determine whether a material contains asbestos.

If you suspect that something in your home is made of asbestos, you have two choices: you can assume that it contains asbestos and take the same precautions you would if you were certain that it did, or you can have it tested by a professional asbestos surveyor. Testing is not very expensive, and it could set your mind at ease.

6. Where might I find asbestos in my home?

Asbestos was used in thousands of different products that were used in home construction and consumer products. Among the most common places to find asbestos are:

- roofing and siding shingles made with asbestos cement
- insulation in homes built between 1930 and 1950
- textured paints used for decorative ceiling and wall coatings (banned in 1977)
- pipe insulation and caulking
- furnace or water heater blankets may contain asbestos
- the floor and walls under and behind stoves, fireplaces and heaters may be protected with asbestos containing millboard, asbestos paper or cement sheets containing asbestos
- the door gaskets in oil or coal furnaces may contain asbestos
- joint compound used to seal wallboard may contain asbestos
- resilient floor tiles or sheet vinyl flooring may have been made with or backed with asbestos containing materials
- decorative plaster treatments on walls and ceilings may contain asbestos



Textured Ceiling Treatment

In addition to the products that were used in constructing your home, you may also have consumer products in your home that contain asbestos. Some of those older products that may still be in your home (or hiding in your attic) include ironing board covers, iron rests, stovetop pads, hot pads, pot holders hair dryers, old powdered joint compound or patching plaster, car repair kits (especially brake repair kits).

7. If there is asbestos in my home, will it have to be removed?

Actually, removing asbestos containing materials from your home is the least recommended course of action. The EPA warns that attempting to remove asbestos-

containing material that is in good condition actually increases the chance that your family may be exposed to asbestos fibers. In most cases, the environmental safety agency says, you should just monitor the material for wear and damage and try not to disturb it.

8. What if the material shows signs of wear or damage?

If the material shows signs of wear or damage, or if it is in a place where it is likely to be damaged, then the EPA suggests that the asbestos be “managed in place”. The two ways of dealing with asbestos in place are:

- encapsulation: treating the material with a coating that either seals the surface to prevent fiber release or penetrates the surface and binds the asbestos fibers to prevent release
- enclosure: covering the asbestos-containing material with a barrier that will prevent asbestos release, such as putting a new floor over the one containing asbestos

9. When should asbestos be removed?

If the asbestos-containing material is severely damaged and is not in a place where it can be encapsulated or enclosed, it may have to be removed. If you are planning major renovations that will disturb the materials that contain asbestos, for instance by knocking out walls, it will have to be removed. If you are planning to demolish an area that contains asbestos, the asbestos will have to be removed.

10. How can I remove asbestos from my home?

The only safe way to remove asbestos from your home is by hiring a licensed, trained professional to do it for you. Removing asbestos safely is a complex process that requires the use of safety equipment and enclosures to reduce the risk of exposing yourself and others to asbestos. If you or a professional determines that asbestos must be removed from your home, the only way to do it safely and abide by all the laws and regulations is to hire a professional.

For more information on asbestos exposure and abatement please visit the [Asbestos and Mesothelioma Center](#).