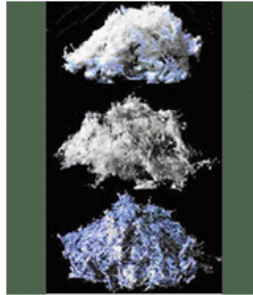


Topic: Asbestos Awareness

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a strong, fire-resistant mineral fibre. In the past, asbestos was used as insulation against heat or noise, and for fire protection. It was also added to materials such as cement and plaster to give them more structural strength.



substantial environmental contact. Research has shown that smoking, in conjunction with asbestos exposure, significantly increases the risk of lung cancer. The health effects of asbestos do not usually present themselves until 15-20 years after exposure.

According to WorkSafeBC, eight municipal workers in B.C. died of an asbestos-related disease between 1990 and 2009. Half of them may have worked with asbestos cement pipe and were likely exposed many years before they died.

How can you become exposed to asbestos?

Asbestos exposure primarily occurs through inhalation of airborne asbestos fibres. These fibres can become airborne when Asbestos-Containing Material (ACM) is disturbed, through breaking, drilling, cutting, sawing, sanding, etc.

Asbestos fibres can stay suspended in the air for hours and appear similar to dust.

Asbestos does NOT pose a risk when it is encased in other materials and not disturbed.

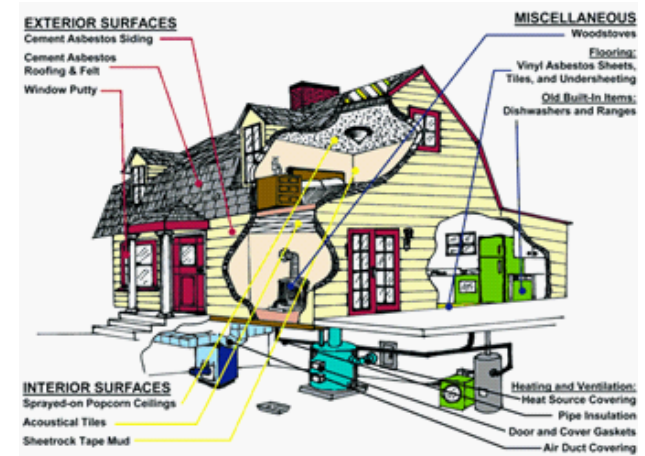
What are the health effects of asbestos exposure?

Airborne asbestos fibres can cause serious health problems when inhaled. People who become ill from asbestos are usually those who are exposed to it on a regular basis, most often in a job where they work directly with the material or through

What do you do when you suspect ACM has been disturbed on a job site?

Disturbance of asbestos cement pipe through cutting, drilling, and other activities may result in elevated levels of airborne asbestos fibres.

If you are a Public Works employee, always follow the established safe work procedure for cutting Asbestos-Cement Pipe. Your municipality should have one and all potentially exposed workers must receive training. See the BCMSA website for an example of a program for cutting AC pipe.



If you are a building inspector, be aware that there may be asbestos being disturbed inside a building under renovation.

The only way of positively identifying ACM is through microscopic analysis. If you are unsure if airborne asbestos fibres are present, it is best to err on the side of caution. Stop the inspection until more information is available or the situation has been remedied.

Important!

Report all incidents of exposure or potential exposure to your supervisor, who will document the incident and take any necessary steps.

If you feel you have had an “exposure” you may also want to file a WorkSafeBC “Information Only” claim for record purposes.

