

# ASBESTOS AWARENESS TRAINING MODULE

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Asbestos is a serious health hazard commonly found in our environment today. This module is designed to provide an overview of asbestos and its associated hazards. It is important for employees who may work in buildings that contain asbestos to know where it is likely to be found and how to avoid exposure.

This Asbestos Awareness – Right to Know Training Module includes the following:

- What is Asbestos?
- Where is Asbestos Found?
- When is Asbestos Dangerous?
- How to Avoid Asbestos Exposure
- Quiz

## What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is the name applied to six naturally occurring minerals that are mined from the earth. The different types of asbestos are:

- Amosite
- Chrysotile
- Tremolite
- Actinolite
- Anthophyllite
- Crocidolite



Of these six, three are used more commonly. **Chrysotile** (white) is the most common, but it is not unusual to encounter **Amosite** (brown / off-white), or **Crocidolite** (blue) as well. All types of asbestos tend to break into very tiny fibers. These individual fibers are so small that many must be identified using a microscope. In fact, some individual fibers may be up to 700 times smaller than a human hair. Because asbestos fibers are so small, once released into the air, they may stay suspended there for hours or even days. Asbestos fibers are also virtually indestructible. They are resistant to chemicals and heat, and they are very stable in the environment. They do not evaporate into air or dissolve in water, and they are not broken down over time. Asbestos is probably the best insulator known to man. Because asbestos has so many useful properties, it has been used in over 3,000 different products. Usually asbestos is mixed with other materials to actually form the products. Floor tiles, for example, may contain only a small percentage of asbestos. Depending on what the product is, the amount of asbestos in asbestos containing materials (ACM) may vary from 1% - 100%.



**Asbestos fibers as seen through a microscope:**

# Where is Asbestos Found?

Asbestos may be found in many different products and many different places. Examples of products that might contain asbestos are:

- Sprayed-on fire proofing and insulation in buildings
- Insulation for pipes and boilers
- Wall and ceiling insulation
- Ceiling tiles
- Floor tiles
- Putties, caulks, and cements (such as in chemical carrying cement pipes)
- Roofing shingles
- Siding shingles on old residential buildings
- Wall and ceiling texture in older buildings and homes
- Joint compound in older buildings and homes
- Brake linings and clutch pads

Asbestos is most likely to be found in:

- Sprayed-on insulation in locations such as various mechanical rooms, steel reinforcing beams, and some ceilings in older buildings
- Ceiling tiles in buildings built prior to 1981
- Most 9" floor tiles in buildings built prior to 1981
- A few 12" floor tiles in buildings built prior to 1981
- Insulation around pipes and boilers, and
- Interiors of fire doors

# When is Asbestos Dangerous?

The most common way for asbestos fibers to enter the body is through breathing. In fact, asbestos containing material is not generally considered to be harmful unless it is releasing dust or fibers into the air where they can be inhaled or ingested. Many of the fibers will become trapped in the mucous membranes of the nose and throat where they can then be removed, but some may pass deep into the lungs, or, if swallowed, into the digestive tract. Once they are trapped in the body, the fibers can cause health problems. Asbestos is most hazardous when it is **friable**. The term "friable" means that the asbestos is easily crumbled by hand, releasing fibers into the air. Sprayed on asbestos insulation is highly friable. Asbestos floor tile is not. Asbestos-containing ceiling tiles, floor tiles, shingles, fire doors, siding shingles, etc. **will not release asbestos fibers** unless they are disturbed or damaged in such a way that the asbestos underneath is actually exposed to the air. If an asbestos ceiling tile is drilled or broken, for example, it may release fibers into the air. If it is left alone and not disturbed, it will not. Damage and deterioration will increase the friability of asbestos-containing materials.

Water damage, continual vibration, aging, and physical impact such as drilling, grinding, buffing, cutting, sawing, or striking can break the materials down making fiber release more likely health effects. Because it is so hard to destroy asbestos fibers, the body cannot break them down or remove them once they are lodged in lung or body tissues. They remain in place where they can cause disease. There are three primary diseases associated with asbestos exposure:

- Asbestosis
- Lung Cancer
- Mesothelioma

## ***Asbestosis***

A serious, chronic, non-cancerous respiratory disease. Inhaled asbestos fibers aggravate lung tissues, which cause them to scar. Symptoms of asbestosis include shortness of breath and a dry crackling sound in the lungs while inhaling. In its advanced stages, the disease may cause cardiac failure.

There is no effective treatment for asbestosis; the disease is usually disabling or fatal. The risk of asbestosis is minimal for those who do not work with asbestos; the disease is rarely caused by neighborhood or family exposure. Those who renovate or demolish buildings that contain asbestos may be at significant risk, depending on the nature of the exposure and precautions taken.

## ***Lung Cancer***

Lung Cancer causes the largest number of deaths related to asbestos exposure. The incidence of lung cancer in people who are directly involved in the mining, milling, and manufacturing and use of asbestos and its products is much higher than in the general population. The most common symptoms of lung cancer are coughing and a change in breathing. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent chest pains, hoarseness, and anemia. People who have been exposed to asbestos and are also exposed to some other carcinogen – such as cigarette smoke – have a significantly greater risk of developing lung cancer than people who have only been exposed to asbestos. One study found that asbestos workers who smoke are about 90 times more likely to develop lung cancer than people who neither smoke nor have been exposed to asbestos.

## ***Mesothelioma***

This is a rare form of cancer that most often occurs in the thin membrane lining of the lungs, chest, abdomen, and (rarely) heart. About 200 cases are diagnosed each year in the United States. Virtually all cases of mesothelioma are linked with asbestos exposure. Approximately 2 percent of all miners and textile workers who work with asbestos, and 10 percent of all workers who were involved in the manufacture of asbestos-containing gas masks, contract mesothelioma. People who work in asbestos mines, asbestos mills and factories, shipyards that use asbestos, as well as people who manufacture and install asbestos insulation have an increased risk of mesothelioma. So do people who live with asbestos workers, near asbestos mining areas, near asbestos product factories or near shipyards where use of asbestos has produced large quantities of airborne asbestos fibers.

## ***Other Cancers***

Evidence suggests that cancers in the esophagus, larynx, oral cavity, stomach, colon and kidney may be caused by ingested asbestos. For more information on asbestos-related cancers, contact your local chapter of the American Cancer Society.

## ***Determining Factors***

Three things seem to determine your likelihood of developing one of these asbestos related diseases:

1. **The amount and duration of exposure** – the more you are exposed to asbestos and the more fibers that enter your body, the more likely you are to develop asbestos related problems. While there is no “safe level” of asbestos exposure, people who are exposed more frequently over a long period of time are more at risk.
2. **Whether or not you smoke** – if you smoke and you have been exposed to asbestos, you are far more likely to develop lung cancer than someone who does not smoke and who has not been exposed to asbestos. If you work with asbestos or have been exposed to it, the first thing you should do to reduce your chances of developing cancer is to stop smoking. Organizations that offer programs, support, or information to help people stop smoking are:
  - National Cancer Institute (1-800-4-CANCER)
  - American Heart Association (1-800-424-8721)
  - American Lung Association (in Oklahoma: 405-524-8471)
3. **Age** – cases of mesothelioma have occurred in the children of asbestos workers whose only exposures were from the dust brought home on the clothing of family members who worked with asbestos. The younger people are when they inhale asbestos, the more likely they are to develop mesothelioma. This is why enormous efforts are being made to prevent school children from being exposed. Because each exposure to asbestos increases the body’s burden of asbestos fibers, it is very important to reduce and minimize your exposure.

## How to Avoid Asbestos Exposure

In order to avoid being exposed to asbestos, you must be aware of the locations it is likely to be found.

**If you do not know whether something is asbestos or not, assume that it is** until it is verified otherwise. Remember that you cannot tell if flooring or ceiling tiles contain asbestos just by looking at them.

If you have reason to suspect that something is asbestos, either because it is labeled as such, or because it is something that is likely to contain asbestos (9: floor tile, for example),

**DO NOT DISTURB IT.**

Never...

- Drill
- Hammer
- Cut
- Saw
- Break
- Damage
- Move
- Disturb
- Sand

Any asbestos-containing materials or suspected materials.

Romulus Community Schools has...

Broken and damaged asbestos floor tiles must be removed by asbestos abatement workers. Report any suspect broken tiles to your building administrator.

By knowing where asbestos is likely to be located and then taking measures not to disturb it, you will protect yourself and others from exposure to this hazardous substance.

## ASBESTOS AWARENESS QUIZ

- Many older buildings will contain some asbestos. You are likely to find asbestos in:
  - Ceiling tiles
  - Floor tiles
  - Pipe insulation
  - All of the above
- If you suspect a material contains asbestos, you should NEVER:
  - Sand it
  - Cut it
  - Drill through it
  - All of the above
- Asbestos fibers are so small they may stay suspended in air for hours or even days.
  - True
  - False
- Which source of asbestos is the most friable?
  - Sprayed-on insulation
  - Undamaged ceiling tiles
  - Floor tiles
  - Lab counter top
- When exposed to asbestos, smokers have the same chance of developing an asbestos-related disease as non-smokers.
  - True
  - False
- Asbestos-containing ceiling tiles, floor tiles, shingles, and siding will not normally release asbestos fibers unless disturbed or damaged in some way.
  - True
  - False
- If you accidentally knock off a chunk of sprayed-on asbestos insulation, you should:
  - Carefully sweep it into a ziplock bag
  - Leave it for a custodian to clean up
  - Report it immediately
  - Get a vacuum
- Three asbestos related diseases are:
  - Lung cancer, Mesothelioma, Asbestosis
  - Lung cancer, Mesothelioma, AIDS
  - Hepatitis B, Mesothelioma, Asbestosis
  - Colon cancer, Asbestosis, Malaria
- Three main things seem to be important in determining your likelihood of developing an asbestos related disease. These are:
  - Smoking / the amount and duration of your exposure / and your gender
  - Type of asbestos mineral to which you are exposed / whether or not you smoke / and your age
  - Your age / whether or not you smoke / and the amount and duration of your exposure
  - None of the above
- There is no evidence to suggest that ingesting or drinking asbestos is harmful.
  - True
  - False