

# A s b e s t o s   i n   Y o u r   H o m e

You may have some asbestos in your home, but may not be sure what it is, what it looks like, or what to do about it. Just because asbestos is there doesn't mean there's a problem. Asbestos may only become harmful when it is damaged and gets into the air. Most asbestos was used between 1930 and the late 1970's. (Important: Asbestos repair and removal work is not for the do-it-yourselfer or even the general home repair contractor.)

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## **When does asbestos become hazardous?**

When there is a loose bond, the asbestos can crumble into a powder. It then releases invisible fibers into the air where we can breathe them in. This kind of asbestos is called friable. It usually appears as flakes or chunks of white material that can be easily crumbled by hand pressure. If you see such bare or damaged material, do not disturb it. Some examples of friable asbestos include certain types of insulation found around heating pipes, furnaces, fireproofing, and textured ceilings.

When asbestos is tightly bonded with another material, there is no problem as long as it stays bonded. Examples of bonded material are floor tiles and some roofing and siding shingles. This kind of asbestos is **nonfriable**. It is not likely to release asbestos fibers. However, cutting, scraping or sanding this material could release fibers. This could be a health hazard.

When materials that contain asbestos are in good shape, they should be left alone. Damaged or worn asbestos material needs special care and handling. If you or your landlord are about to do fix-up work, repairs, or putting in a new heating or electrical system, be careful. Asbestos materials must not be disturbed while working.

## **The Health Risks of Exposure to Asbestos**

Asbestos fibers are invisible to the human eye. Because the fibers are so small, light and fluffy, they can float in the air for a long time. When breathed in, asbestos fibers easily enter the body.

## **Asbestos-Related Disease**

Being exposed to asbestos can cause these different diseases:

- Asbestosis, which is scar tissue in the lungs. This usually results from exposure over a long time to asbestos fibers in the air at the workplace.
- Lung cancer.
- Mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the lung or abdomen.
- Gastro-intestinal cancer.

The amount of time between first breathing in asbestos and the first signs of disease can vary from 10 to 40 years. The more a person is exposed to asbestos, the more the risk of getting an asbestos-related disease.

## **Smoking and Asbestos Exposure**

Cigarette smokers get lung cancer 10 times more often than non-smokers. Smokers who also breathe in asbestos fibers get lung cancer up to 92-times more than people who don't smoke and aren't exposed to asbestos. This is why it is very important for people who have been exposed to asbestos to stop smoking. Smoking can cause cancer as well as heart disease, emphysema, and other diseases.

Remember: It's never too late to stop smoking. This because your lungs clean themselves. Your chance of getting lung cancer becomes less and less over time, once you stop smoking.

## **Places Where Asbestos Can Be Found in the Home**

**Furnaces and Stoves:** When an old furnace or boiler which is insulated with asbestos is changed to a new heating system, the chance of a large release of asbestos fibers is great. Before fix-up or conversion, asbestos should be removed by a licensed New Jersey asbestos contractor.

**Door Gaskets:** Door gaskets found on furnaces and wood/coal burning stoves may contain asbestos.

**Pipe Insulation:** Asbestos pipe insulation looks white, chalky, and is wrapped in a thin canvas. Another type looks like corrugated paper wrapped with tape or paper that has been cut to fit around the pipes or furnace ducts.

**Wall and Ceiling Materials:** Older homes may have wall and ceiling materials that contain asbestos. It's texture is rough and grainy. Water leaks or constant vibrations can make these surfaces loose.

**Roofing, Shingles and Siding:** They are not likely to release fibers unless they are

cut, sawn, drilled, sanded, or broken.

**Floor Tiles and Sheet Flooring:** The asbestos in floor tiles and linoleum flooring is tightly bound. The backings on some flooring may also contain asbestos.

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The tiles won't release fibers unless they are disturbed. Don't let anyone scrape or sand your tile floor. If your old floor is worn, it is safer, easier, and cheaper to cover it with new flooring material instead of removing it.

If someone has to put in a new floor they should get the free booklet called, *Recommended Work Procedures for Resilient Floor Coverings*. This booklet tells how to reduce fiber release when removing old floors. To get a copy, write to: Resilient Floor Covering Institute, 966 Hungerford Drive, Suite 12-B, Rockville, MD 20850.

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## **If There is Asbestos in Your Home, What Should You Do About It?**

1. **Be informed:** not all state regulations that apply to schools and public buildings cover private homes and multi-housing buildings. You can call the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services at (609) 984-2193. If you rent a home, first speak to your landlord or building manager.

**Remember:** when asbestos materials are in good shape you should leave them alone and contact your building owner.

2. The only sure way of knowing if a material contains asbestos is to have it tested. If you are going to have samples taken, an expert who works with an accredited laboratory should do the sampling and testing. Call an environmental engineering firm. They can tell you where and how much asbestos you have and what to do about it.
3. There are four solutions to common asbestos problems:
  - **Maintenance** of asbestos material can be done when the asbestos material is not in bad shape.
  - **Encapsulation** (spraying with a sealant) covers the asbestos.
  - **Enclosure** is building a permanent air-tight barrier around the asbestos material. Regular inspections should be made when using any of these three methods. This is to check for signs of wear or damage.

- **Removal** is the only permanent solution, but it is costly and should be the last choice.
4. All asbestos work should be done by trained workers. For most cases, the law requires your landlord to hire a state-licensed contractor for asbestos work. Check to see that the contractor's New Jersey asbestos license is current. Also, check that all workers have current New Jersey state-issued asbestos permits with their pictures on them.
  5. Asbestos waste should **NEVER** be put out with the regular trash or disposed of in a regular dumpster.
  6. A visual inspection should be made to look for dust and debris. Air sample tests should be done to find any asbestos fibers in the air. These tests should be done by an environmental engineering firm not connected with the removal contractor.

## **If You Think It Could Be Asbestos Then Follow These Do's and Don'ts**

- Don't smoke.
- Don't touch or disturb asbestos material on walls, ceilings, pipes or boilers.
- Don't allow children to play near pipes or furnaces which have friable asbestos insulation around them. Just tossing a ball against asbestos material could release many invisible fibers.
- Don't let your dog or cat run free in a basement with asbestos materials. The animal can pick up asbestos fibers on its fur and shake them off in other areas of the home.
- Don't dust, sweep, or vacuum debris you think contains asbestos. (Remember: a regular vacuum cleaner allows asbestos fibers to pass right through it and re-enter the room.)
- Don't hang plants or other things from ceilings that may contain asbestos.
- Don't tack or hammer nails into walls made from asbestos.
- Don't allow curtain rods or room dividers hanging on ceiling tracks to bump or brush into walls or ceilings.
- Don't brush, sweep or sand ceilings and walls that contain asbestos insulation.

- Don't knock the plaster or ceiling panels loose when replacing light bulbs or fixtures.
- Don't saw or drill holes in asbestos materials.
- Do quit smoking today.
- Do routine inspections on walls, ceilings, pipes and boilers which contain asbestos. This to make sure that any asbestos material is in good shape.
- Do change your shoes before going back upstairs from the basement if there is damaged asbestos materials present in the basement.
- Do use a wet mop or wet cloth when cleaning areas that may contain asbestos fibers. Dispose of the mop or cloth when done.
- Do take care not to run into or hit the asbestos material with anything.

Source: NJ Department of Health and Senior Services