



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

Office of the Safety and Health Coordinator

ASBESTOS INFORMATION SHEET

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally-occurring mineral and can typically be found in rock, sediment or soil. It has strong fibres that are heat resistant and have good insulating properties. These are some of the main reasons why asbestos was originally widely used in construction and certain manufacturing processes.

Asbestos fibres cannot be readily seen with the naked eye and because they are very light, they can be easily blown long distances by the wind if and when disturbed and the necessary safety precautions are not taken.

Because of its properties, which are described as being either 'non-friable' or 'friable' generally, asbestos was seen as being very useful for building products over several decades ago. Hence, depending on the age of buildings asbestos may still be found in some buildings today:

- **Friable asbestos** is a material containing asbestos that when dry, is in powder form or may be crushed or pulverised into powder form using your hand. This type of asbestos or asbestos containing material poses a higher risk of exposing people to airborne asbestos fibres. Friable asbestos was commonly used in industrial applications rather than in buildings generally, although loose-fill asbestos may be found in some homes, commercial private or public buildings where it was typically used as ceiling and wall insulation.
- **Non-friable** or bonded asbestos products are solid and are very difficult to crumble by bare hand. This type of asbestos has been mixed with a bonding compound such as cement. If non-friable asbestos is damaged or degraded it may become friable and will then pose a higher risk of fibre release.

What is the Hazard?

Asbestos that is intact, not damaged, otherwise deteriorating or disturbed poses no immediate threat to the safety, health and wellbeing of people generally.

However, asbestos fibres that are released into the air during activities that disturb asbestos or asbestos containing materials (ACM) could. The asbestos fibres could be inhaled by unsuspecting individuals and without knowing and then get trapped in the lungs. If the fibres get swallowed, they could become embedded into the digestive tract. Asbestos is a known human carcinogen (cancer causing agent). Asbestos fibres may cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

The development of any symptoms of ill-health, cancers or related disease connected to any asbestos exposure may take many years to develop following initial exposure.

- The risk of contracting these diseases increases with the number of fibres inhaled.
- The risk of lung cancer from inhaling asbestos fibres is greater for people that smoke.
- People who develop health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to significantly high levels of asbestos over a very long period of time. Symptoms don't usually appear until 20 to 30 years after initial exposure.

Where is the Hazard?

The hazard may occur during activities that disturb asbestos-containing materials such as building construction, renovation, repair and or maintenance works; manufacturing of asbestos containing products; or clean-up from related activities, contact with deteriorating asbestos-containing materials (ACM) and during clean-up works after natural disasters.

Some materials that maybe presumed to contain asbestos may include the following:

- Thermal system insulation covers or wrap materials
- Roofing and siding shingles
- Vinyl floor tiles, Mastics
- Plaster, cement, putties, and caulk
- Ceiling tiles and spray-on coatings
- Industrial pipe-wrapping
- Heat resistant textiles
- Automobile brake linings and clutch pads

Managing the risks associated with asbestos

Managing the risks associated with asbestos involves:

- Identifying asbestos and asbestos containing material and documenting where it has been identified or otherwise suspected to be.
- Posting safety warning signage within and around where and once the presence of asbestos has been suspected or positively confirmed to be present.
- Advising personnel of actual and suspected asbestos findings and educating them about the potential dangers the material may pose and the need to avoid unnecessary contact with the material, as well as, the importance of avoiding entering such areas without permission or authorization once it has been suspected to contain or confirmed as having asbestos.
- Assessing the risk of exposure to airborne asbestos from any damaged asbestos containing material and implementing safety measures to protect personnel.
- Conducting air and surface quality sampling to determine if and where any asbestos fibres may be present. If confirmed by laboratory analysis, undertaken timely asbestos abatement.
- Eliminating or minimizing the risks associated with asbestos by implementing control measures and observing all statutory requirements for dealing with asbestos.
- Monitoring and reviewing control measures to make sure they are effective.