

Asbestos in Homes

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fiber mined from the earth. It is heat and chemical resistant, and is easily formed into just about any shape or product. It was used in more than 3,000 different construction materials and manufactured products, including many found in homes.

Why is it a concern?

When disturbed, asbestos breaks down into very small fibers up to 1,200 times thinner than a human hair. These tiny fibers easily become airborne and when inhaled, they can travel deep into the lungs and become trapped in lung tissue. Once trapped, these fibers can cause mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis. There's no known safe level of asbestos exposure, and medical research indicates these fibers can cause severe lung diseases and cancer in 10 to 30 years after the initial asbestos exposure.

This is why it's important to identify asbestos-containing materials in your home so you can protect your health as well as your family's health.

What products contain asbestos?

The following is a short list of some of the more common asbestos containing materials found in homes:

Adhesives	Gaskets
Appliance components	Heat shields (paper and corrugated cardboard)
Ceiling products	Pipe insulation
Ceiling texture (Popcorn texture)	Tank insulation
Ceiling tiles	Paints and coatings
Ceiling tile mastic	Plaster
Cement-asbestos board (Transite) products	Roofing Products
Chimney flue lining	Base flashing
Ducts	Felt
Pipes	Shingles
Shingles	Tar or "Black Jack"
Siding	Table pads
Wall Panels	Vermiculite
Electrical products	Attic and wall insulation
Cloth wire insulation	Fireplace decoration
Electrical panels	Gardening products
Flooring Products	Vinyl wall coverings
Asphalt floor tiles	Wall applications
Floor tile mastic	Caulking and putties
Vinyl floor tiles	Spackling compounds
Vinyl sheet flooring (linoleum)	Wallboard or sheetrock
Heating and Cooling System products	Wallboard joint compound
Boiler insulation	Window glazing
Duct work insulation	
Furnace insulation	

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How do I find out if it's asbestos?

You can check for asbestos markings on the material or its packaging, or you can hire an Iowa-certified asbestos inspector to sample the material or perform an asbestos inspection. Companies that perform sampling and inspections are listed in the Yellow Pages under "Asbestos Consulting and Testing", or contact the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Aren't all asbestos products banned?

No. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has banned the use of only the following asbestos-containing products in new construction and renovation:

- Spray-applied material
- Pipe insulation
- Boilers and hot water tank insulation
- Various paper and sheet products
- New uses of asbestos

The EPA has no existing bans on other asbestos-containing products or uses.

If you have asbestos in your home...

Leave it alone

Asbestos is only a problem if asbestos fibers are released into the air. If the asbestos material is in good condition and if it is not being disturbed, then it will not release asbestos fibers. The safest and least costly option may be to leave the asbestos material alone.

Repair it

Sometimes, asbestos materials can be repaired. If the asbestos material has minimal damage, it may be repaired with a special coating called encapsulant. Check with your hardware store or a safety supply store for materials to repair or encapsulate asbestos.

Remove it

Removing the asbestos material may be the best option if the asbestos material is extensively damaged or if it will be disturbed by renovation or other activities. Homeowners may legally remove asbestos materials themselves from the single-family home they own and occupy. However, it is strongly recommended that a licensed asbestos contractor is utilized.

Licensed contractors use techniques that are unavailable to homeowners, so the asbestos is handled safely. They also perform air monitoring to see if the air in your home meets acceptable standards during and at the end of the project.

How do I get more information?

For more information about asbestos, contact the Iowa Department of Public Health at 1-866-227-9878 or visit <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/>