THE ASBESTOS PROBLEM

What is asbestos and why is it dangerous?

Asbestos is the name of a group of fibrous natural minerals mined all over the world. This group consists of chrysotile (white asbestos), actinolite, amosite (brown asbestos), crocidolite (blue asbestos), anthophyllite, and tremolite.

Asbestos has been widely used in the construction industry and can be found in insulation, friction materials, textiles, and building products. Due to its wide range of physical properties and uses, it was considered the "Miracle Fiber". It was commonly used in fire retardant insulation on beams, fire walls and doors until 1973, in mechanical insulation on pipes, ducts and boilers until 1975, and in acoustical and decorative insulation on ceilings and walls, until 1978.

Exposure to high levels of asbestos has been linked to a progressive lung disease known as Asbestosis. Lower levels of exposure have been linked to mesotheliomas (a rare cancer of the lining of the chest and abdominal region) and cancers of the lung, esophagus, stomach, colon, and other tissues.

Do you have an asbestos problem?

The only sure method to determine if a material contains asbestos is to obtain a bulk sample and have it analyzed by a laboratory qualified for asbestos indentification. Building records provide a good initial step when seeking asbestos containing materials.

Only small samples are required for analysis, but they must be representative of the material being sampled. This requires identifying like materials. It is suggested, by the EPA, that at least three core samples of material be collected in each like area. Sample should be submitted to a laboratory participating in the EPA Quality Assurance Program for Bulk Sample Analysis. The type and the concentration of asbestos in the material should be reported by the laboratory. Damage to the material caused by the sampling process should be sealed with an EPA tested encapsulant.

Sampling by an inexperienced person could seriously jeopardize the integrity of the results of the assessment; therefore a qualified laboratory should be retained for the survey.

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