

Safety Facts: Asbestos Awareness*

Asbestos is a mineral silicate mined and used throughout the world for over 2000 years. The reasons for the widespread use include its resistance to burning – even at high temperatures, great strength resisting chemical corrosion, non-electrically conductive, and flexibility.

Why is it important?

Researchers identified health risks linked to asbestos exposure as early as 1930, but asbestos was still used in building materials in Canada until 1990. Potential sources of asbestos are:

- Floor tiles
- Insulation
- Drywall compound
- Siding materials (stucco, cement board)
- Soffit materials
- Window putty
- Electrical insulation
- Acoustical tiles

Key characteristics of asbestos

Asbestos becomes a risk when it becomes airborne during renovations, demolition, repair work or when asbestos-containing material is disturbed by accident.

Awareness of asbestos and what to do in an emergency is the key to working safely around asbestos.

Employers and building owners are responsible for conducting an asbestos survey, asbestos inventory, and risk assessment.

Associated risks/hazards

When asbestos is disturbed, it releases tiny asbestos fibres into the air. When you breathe in asbestos fibres, they can be trapped in the lungs and remain there for a long time. These fibres can accumulate and cause scarring and inflammation of the lungs – leading to breathing issues, severe lung conditions, and even cancer.

Preventive next steps

The following are some key precautions that need to be addressed by employers to ensure the safety of workers working around asbestos:

- Employers must determine the presence of asbestos in their facility if the building is built pre-1990
- Have asbestos material inventoried and a risk assessment conducted
- Create and implement an asbestos management control plan (as required)
- Provide asbestos awareness training to at-risk workers (those working in proximity to asbestos)
- Provide guidelines to prevent an accidental asbestos spill
- Create an asbestos spill action plan



For additional resources visit:

[Asbestos](#) – Occupational Health and Safety Regulations Part 6.1

[Asbestos](#) – WorkSafeBC

[Safe Work Practices for Handling Asbestos](#) – WorkSafeBC

[The Impact of Asbestos](#) – WorkSafeBC (video)

