

Tool Box Talk

ASBESTOS

August 2016

What is asbestos?

Asbestos, meaning “inextinguishable” in Greek, is the fibrous form of crocidolite, amosite, chrysotile, anthophyllite, tremolite or a mixture containing any of these materials. Asbestos was commonly used for insulating buildings and homes against cold weather and noise, and due to its heat and fire resistant characteristics, it was also a popular fireproofing material used in the early 1900s. In most commercial forms, asbestos looks like attic insulation—a ball of thick fuzz. The construction industry have, and some continue, to use asbestos in products such as cement and



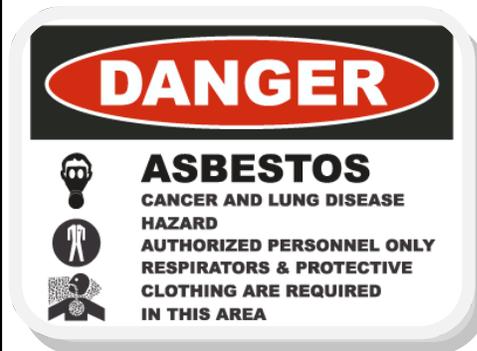
plaster, industrial furnaces and heating systems, building insulation, floor and ceiling tiles, house siding, car and truck brake pads and vehicle transmission components, such as clutches. If you work in a building built before 1990, it's likely that some parts of it will contain asbestos.

What are the health risks of exposure?

Inhaling asbestos fibres can cause cancer and other diseases, including, Asbestosis, which refers to scarring and stiffening of the lungs caused by inhaling asbestos dust over many years. Asbestosis makes breathing difficult and may lead to fatal diseases such as pneumonia and heart disease. Exposure can also cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the linings of the lungs and abdomen. Asbestos-related diseases and symptoms generally take 20 to 30 years to develop from the time of initial exposure and smokers are at an increased risk of developing them.

Hazards of Asbestos

Because asbestos is often mixed with other materials, it's difficult to know if you are working with this hazardous material. Because



the individual asbestos fibres that are released into the air are microscopic, it is important to avoid disturbing asbestos and to be trained to work with this hazardous material safely. Renovating or demolishing houses containing asbestos products can release asbestos fibres, which are extremely fine and can stay airborne for hours. Inhaling asbestos fibres may cause serious health problems, including lung disease and cancer.

There are no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are:

- ✘ Sealed behind walls and floorboards
- ✘ Isolated in an attic
- ✘ Left undisturbed

If you think you have encountered asbestos:

- ✘ Shut down the work area immediately and report your findings to your supervisor
- ✘ Avoid breathing in the dust
- ✘ Ensure an investigation is conducted

Asbestos Legislation

Refer to Part XXIII of the Saskatchewan *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations* for detailed legal safety requirements and procedures for when exposed to or handling asbestos.



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