

Toolbox Safety Topic

Asbestos Awareness

Just 50 years ago, asbestos was known as the “magic mineral”. It’s amazingly strong and fireproof, which is why it was used in thousands of different products. All kinds of building materials, automobile parts such as brake linings and clutch pads, insulation, and mastics were comprised of asbestos and other materials. Since most of the buildings here on campus were built in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, it’s reasonable to expect to find asbestos containing materials just about everywhere.

We are all exposed to it. Not only is it present in our buildings at work, but in our homes as well. As long as it remains undisturbed and does not become airborne, it does not pose a threat. The law requires that all employees who work with, or around, asbestos receive special training to minimize exposure.

A common myth regarding asbestos is that it’s illegal to produce asbestos containing materials, so why worry about it? The U.S. can still manufacture products which contain asbestos for export, and for products where a safer product does not exist, such as brake linings. Other countries import asbestos containing materials to the U.S. by labeling it as “a naturally occurring mineral”, or by stating the type of asbestos (Chrysotile, Amosite, Tremolite, etc.) which most consumers would not recognize as asbestos. When it comes to asbestos containing products in today’s market, it “buyer beware”. If you don’t specify “non-asbestos containing”, chances are you’ll get products which contain asbestos.

What’s so dangerous about asbestos?

- Asbestos fibers are very small. If you inhale them, they go deep into your lungs, and stay there, possibly causing disease 10 to 40 years later.
- Asbestosis (a lung disease) and mesothelioma (a rare type of cancer) are both diseases that only people exposed to asbestos get.
- You’re 90 times more likely to develop lung cancer if you smoke and are exposed to asbestos than people who do not smoke and are not exposed to asbestos.

What are some asbestos containing materials that you may run into during your work?

- Roofing felt, shingles, and patch material
- Vinyl floor tile and linoleum backing
- Pipe and boiler insulation
- Fireproofing
- Spray-on decorative acoustical ceiling material
- Putties, caulks, cements and other mastics

What should you do if you suspect that the materials you’re working with may contain asbestos?

- Stop work immediately and clear the area.
- Call EHSS at 231-4207 to obtain information on the specific location and material you were working on. (Sampling may be required if not previously determined.)
- If the material is positive for asbestos, only a properly trained crew can remove, repair, encapsulate, or enclose it.
- It’s important to change your clothes and wash up before you go home so that asbestos fibers are not spread to your car, your home, and your family members.
- ALL asbestos waste, scrap, and contaminated clothing that might release asbestos dust into the air should be disposed of as a hazardous waste. A licensed asbestos abatement contractor should properly dispose of asbestos containing materials. Do not do it yourself.
- The best thing you can do to avoid asbestos exposure is to LEAVE IT ALONE. Never disturb suspect material by sanding, drilling, cutting, or damaging it in any way.

Any questions?

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Date: _____

Meeting Conducted By: _____ Title: _____

Attendees

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