

Asbestos Information Guide



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Massachusetts Department Of Environmental Protection Bureau Of Waste Prevention

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What is Asbestos? Is it hazardous to your health?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring, mostly fibrous mineral and may consist of any one of a number of silicates. Asbestos is used in a variety of products because of its physical properties, which make it resistant to heat, fire, and many caustic chemicals. Asbestos has been used extensively as fireproofing, an insulating agent, and for decorative purposes, among many other uses.

The physical properties that give asbestos its resistance to heat and decay are linked with several adverse human effects. Asbestos tends to break into a dust of microscopic fibers. Because of their size and shape, these tiny fibers can remain suspended in the air for long periods of time and can easily penetrate bodily tissue when inhaled. Because of their durability, these fibers can remain in the body for many years.

Asbestos is known to cause asbestosis and various forms of cancer. **Asbestosis** is a chronic disease of the lungs which makes breathing progressively more difficult, and can lead to death. Cancer can result from breathing asbestos fibers and **lung cancer** is the most frequent. **Mesothelioma**, an incurable cancer of the chest and abdominal membranes, almost never occurs without exposure to asbestos. Asbestos related diseases have a long latency period and do not show up until 10 to 40 years after exposure. Each exposure increases the likelihood of developing an asbestos-related disease.

Material containing 1% asbestos fibers or more by weight is regulated. For this guide the term asbestos includes asbestos containing material and waste materials contaminated with asbestos.

Does Asbestos have to be removed?

If asbestos is in good condition and it does not pose a health hazard, no laws or regulations require that it be removed. However, building owners are required to keep asbestos in good repair to prevent releases of visible or particulate asbestos emissions under state and federal regulations. If a demolition/renovation or repair activity could cause damage to asbestos-containing material, then it is required that the asbestos be removed prior to the activity. Demolition of a building requires that all asbestos be removed prior to demolition.

How do I know if my building contains Asbestos? How do I choose a contractor?

Hire a DOS certified asbestos consultant to determine if asbestos is present and whether removal/repair is necessary. If the building is a state-owned facility, contact DCAM and DOS. DOS provides a list of licensed asbestos abatement contractors and consultants. You may wish to ask about a contractor's history of violations. Only DOS licensed and DOS certified asbestos abatement contractors and consultants may be hired to perform asbestos-related work in Massachusetts.

Are there any laboratories that test material to determine if material contains Asbestos?

There are many private testing laboratories that will perform asbestos bulk sample analysis to determine whether or not a material contains asbestos. Contact DOS for a list of certified labs. DOS will test materials submitted by public agencies. Before any testing is done, a sample must be collected utilizing proper work practices to minimize disturbance of any asbestos-containing material and to prevent the release of asbestos emissions to the

inside and outside environments. Private contractors and consultants must receive DOS licensing and certification to do this.

Are there any state agencies that test the air for Asbestos?

DOS will perform a hazard inspection for non-federal public workplaces, but air monitoring is limited to buildings occupied by municipal, state and county employers. Owners or tenants of other buildings may hire a licensed asbestos abatement inspector and testing laboratory. Call DOS for a list.

Should I remove Asbestos myself?

It is strongly recommended that only a DOS certified worker do asbestos handling on behalf of homeowners. Asbestos fibers pose a serious health threat. There are DEP requirements for anyone handling asbestos, including special supplies and equipment, specific work practices including setting up a containment area, air filtration equipment, packaging and labeling of waste. If the area is contaminated by improper handling of asbestos, cleanup procedures specific to the job are required. For public and worker protection, DOS requires that any entity or individual engaged in the business of asbestos abatement or containment be licensed and certified.

Does anyone have to be notified of asbestos removal? Are there any notification fees?

There is a single notification form to file for DEP and DOS. DEP requires notification for any asbestos handling project including demolition and disposal at least ten (10) **working days** prior to conducting any asbestos removal work. DOS requires notification for any asbestos handling project including demolition and disposal at least ten (10) **calendar days** prior to conducting any asbestos removal work. In order to properly notify of an asbestos removal job, contact either DEP or DOS to receive a copy of the "**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asbestos Notification Guide**" and form (**BWP AQ04**) which may be used for notifying both agencies. The Notification Guide and forms are also available on DEP's website at www.mass.gov/dep/ by going to "Permit Applications".

Both asbestos removal and general construction notification forms are available on DEP's website at www.mass.gov/dep/ by going to "Permit Applications". Check with the local Board of Health, Fire Department, and Building Inspector for requirements for local notice prior to beginning the work.

Is Asbestos a hazardous waste or a solid waste?

Asbestos is classified as a "special waste" under the DEP solid waste regulations. Asbestos and material that contains or is contaminated with asbestos require special handling and transporting as set out in DEP regulations. It can only be disposed of in landfills that have been approved to accept asbestos-containing waste materials. Mishandling of asbestos may also be a violation of regulations other than air and solid waste.

How do I dispose of Asbestos shingles, siding, & cement products?

As with all asbestos waste materials, these must be sealed into leak tight containers prior to disposal. The containers must also display the proper identifying and warning labels required by DEP, DOS, OSHA, EPA, and DOT. These materials are regulated as a special waste and must be disposed in an approved landfill that accepts asbestos-containing waste material. All regulatory notification and work practice requirements apply to these materials.

What special handling is required for disposal of Asbestos?

Before asbestos can be disposed of, it must be wetted and sealed in leak-tight, properly labeled containers (i.e. sealed in drums or "double-bagged" by placing the asbestos in a plastic bag (6 mil) which is then placed in another plastic bag (6 mil)). Contaminated clothing and equipment must also be handled this way. Each bag or container must be individually labeled with all information required by regulation.

Where can Asbestos Waste be disposed?

Asbestos waste that is thoroughly wetted, properly packaged and labeled can be disposed of in a Massachusetts landfill that is specifically permitted by the DEP to accept asbestos-containing waste materials (special waste). Contact the closest DEP regional office for information on two very limited exceptions for Vinyl Asbestos Tile (VAT) and asphaltic roofing materials.

Where do I find a disposal facility?

At present, there is only one landfill in Massachusetts that is permitted to accept asbestos wastes. The landfill is the Waste Management landfill in Chicopee. The telephone number for the landfill is: (413) 594-4172, and for Waste Management is: (413) 539-9036. Some out-of-state landfills also accept asbestos. Before taking asbestos to a landfill, contact the facility to determine if, when, and under what conditions the facility will accept asbestos. Licensed asbestos abatement contractors can be hired to remove asbestos and take it to an approved disposal facility. Contact the DOS for a list. Asbestos wastes may not be sent to an incinerator or resource recovery facility.

Whom do I notify if I suspect illegal asbestos removal or disposal?

Contact the nearest DEP or DOS office and your Local Board of Health. On weekends and holidays call 1-888-304-1133, the emergency response system.

Are there products being sold that contain asbestos?

Yes, products containing regulated amounts of asbestos are being sold in retail stores. Material Safety Data Sheets should be available from the manufacturer, but if the product label does not identify that it contains asbestos, you may wish to ask the manufacturer. Examples of products containing asbestos include floor tile, mastic, and roofing tar. A more detailed list is available on the EPA website at <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos>.

Buyers or sellers who want to resolve differences among themselves or with a REALTOR can take advantage of the Berkshire County Board of REALTORS® endorsed dispute resolution system. This process is administered through our partner, The Berkshire Regional Housing Authority in Pittsfield, MA. The system aids in the settlement of differences between sellers and buyers, and between consumers and real estate practitioners, through mediation rather than costly and time-consuming litigation.