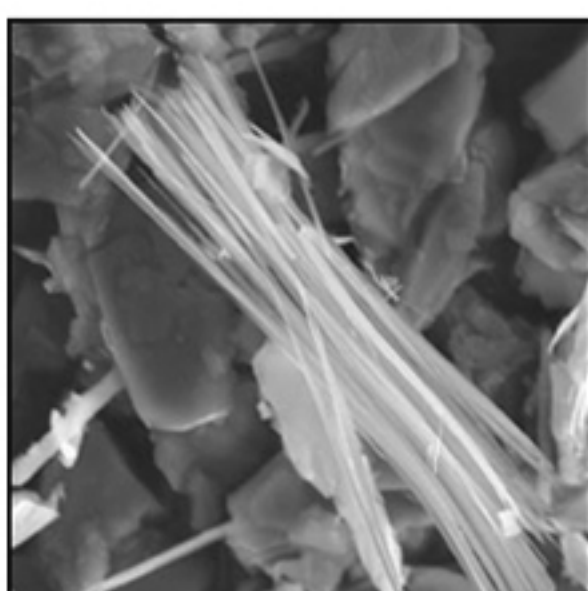


## Asbestos In The Home

Leaving well enough alone may be the best course of action when it comes to asbestos, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Disturbing these mineral fibers can cause their release into the air. If individuals breathe in high levels of asbestos, studies have shown that exposure can cause scarring of the lungs and other serious respiratory conditions.

What is asbestos? It is the name given to a variety of silicates that occur naturally in geological formations around the world. These fibers have properties including strength, flexibility and stability when exposed to heat or other chemical compounds. Because of these advantages, asbestos was widely used in the 20th Century in thousands of commercial products and building materials.



While asbestos has been regulated in the United States since 1980, older products and building materials may still contain large concentrations of this material. Some older products that might contain asbestos include:

- ✗ Coffee pots
- ✗ Toasters
- ✗ Popcorn poppers
- ✗ Crock pots
- ✗ Irons
- ✗ Hair dryers (especially dangerous because they blow asbestos directly into the air)
- ✗ Electric blankets
- ✗ Ironing board covers
- ✗ Portable heaters

In the United States, asbestos products are no longer available to the general public. Its use today is heavily regulated by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and is mainly limited to commercial and industrial applications. Because of its unique physical properties, asbestos remains an important component of products including roofing compounds used on commercial buildings, gaskets, and friction products, such as brake shoes and clutches.



Asbestos-containing material can still be found in many public and private structures (including public buildings and schools) and homes today. The older the building, the more likely it is that asbestos is present. Most residential homes constructed within the past 20 years are unlikely to contain asbestos.

If you live in an older home, how can you determine whether your home contains asbestos materials? Unfortunately, asbestos can't be identified by simply looking at it, unless it is labeled. Only a person trained in asbestos fiber identification can identify it using a special polarized light microscope. There are environmental consultants who can be hired to identify asbestos in building materials. Prior to 1970, asbestos was commonly used in resilient floor tiles (vinyl asbestos, asphalt, and rubber), the backing on vinyl sheet flooring, and adhesives used for installing floor tile, as well as in thermal insulation, fire proofing and other building materials.

What can you do if you discover there is asbestos in your home? First, don't panic, and second, don't disturb the materials. Generally, material in good condition will not release asbestos fibers into the air.



The three choices for dealing with asbestos are either to remove it, contain it or live with it. If the asbestos material is in good condition it is often best to leave it alone. The only way it can affect your health is when the material is damaged and fibers become airborne.

If the materials are moderately damaged, it is recommended that a homeowner manages it in place by repairing and containing the damage, in some cases with a coat of paint or sealer. Sealing involves treating the material with a sealant that either binds the asbestos fibers together or coats the material so fibers are not released. Pipe, furnace and boiler insulation can sometimes be repaired this way. This should be done only by a professional trained to handle asbestos safely. Covering the material involves placing something over or around the material that contains asbestos to prevent the release of fibers. Exposed insulated piping can be covered with a protective wrap or jacket.

With any type of repair, the asbestos remains in place. Removing and disposing of asbestos material is expensive and also increases the likelihood of releasing the fibers into the air.

However, homeowners who feel they cannot live with the asbestos as it exists should consider the services of an asbestos abatement contractor. There are commercial companies that can be hired to remove asbestos from homes and buildings. These companies are not regulated on a state-by-state basis, however, so it is smart to check out a particular company with the local Better Business Bureau. Asbestos removal can be highly expensive and time-consuming, so soliciting bids from several companies is a sensible plan.