

Occupational Health and Safety Advisory



Worker Exposure to Asbestos in the Demolition and Renovation Industries



Asbestos exposure is a hazard in the demolition and renovation industries.

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals with unique physical characteristics including extraordinary tensile strength, poor heat conduction and resistance to chemical attack. For these reasons, asbestos was often used as an ingredient in a wide range of construction products. Unprotected workers can be exposed to asbestos mainly by breathing in the fibres which are released when the asbestos containing materials (ACM) are disturbed.

Alberta  Government

During building demolition, asbestos fibres may be released if building materials containing asbestos have not been removed. If the building was built before 1990 there is a chance that some materials may contain asbestos.

The health effects of asbestos exposure

Asbestos fibers accumulate in the lungs causing scarring and inflammation. As the scarring and inflammation progresses, it can affect breathing and lead to serious and irreversible health problems. Exposure to all types of asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, cancer of the larynx and ovary, as well as other non-cancerous lung disorders like asbestosis and pleural disease.

What to do if you suspect you are exposed to asbestos in the workplace

If you suspect that a demolition or renovation project is resulting in worker exposure to asbestos, contact the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre at (toll free) 1-866-415-8690.

If you suspect you have been exposed to asbestos, report the incident to the Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre and tell your doctor. Medical monitoring assesses the health effects of exposure to asbestos long after the exposure has occurred. Most people do not show any signs or symptoms resulting from asbestos-related disease for at least 10-20 yrs. Only a doctor can assess if your health problems are from exposure to asbestos. A health assessment must be done within 30 days after a worker becomes an exposed worker. An exposed worker is a worker who may work in an area where the airborne concentration of asbestos exceeds the Occupational Exposure Limit of 0.1 fibres per cubic centimeter of air over an eight hour period for at least 30 work days in a 12-month period.

Where can you be exposed to asbestos during demolition work?

If a building is to be demolished, the employer must ensure that materials with the potential to release asbestos fibres are removed first. Some municipal jurisdictions require confirmation that this has been completed before demolition or development permits are issued. If a structure is to be demolished with the asbestos left in place an acceptance must be obtained from Alberta Occupational Health and Safety.

The following products in the workplace may contain asbestos:

- drywall mud
- furnace/boiler duct tape and wrap
- exterior stucco and siding
- ceiling tiles
- mechanical insulation
- vinyl sheet flooring
- plaster,
- vinyl asbestos floor tiles
- pipe insulation
- roofing materials
- vermiculite insulation
- light fixtures

Workers may be exposed to asbestos during the following demolition related activities:

- The demolition of asbestos containing structures using heavy equipment
- Hand demolition of asbestos containing structures or materials
- Renovation projects where demolition is conducted or following the completion of an uncontrolled demolition
- Handling of equipment and materials contaminated with asbestos
- Disposal of asbestos containing waste
- Transfer and dumping of asbestos containing waste
- Site cleaning activities where asbestos has been disturbed



Improperly disposed of asbestos waste

How can exposure be controlled?

If a building is to be demolished, the employer must ensure that materials with the potential to release asbestos fibres are removed first. Some municipal jurisdictions require confirmation that this has been completed before demolition or development permits are issued. Removal of asbestos containing materials prior to demolition by a trained and competent employer is a legislated requirement. The Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual provides best practices and outlines the appropriate controls to follow for asbestos abatement in Alberta.

Asbestos waste disposal

Asbestos in Alberta must be transported in accordance with the Provincial Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act and the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Regulation. Asbestos must be disposed of in accordance with the Alberta Environment document *Guidelines for the Disposal of Asbestos Waste*. The waste must not enter the general waste stream, and it must be sent to a class 1 or 2 landfill designated by Alberta Environment.

More Information

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre (toll free): 1-866-415-8690

<http://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/2874.html>

Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual

<http://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/2988.html>

Asbestos at the Work Site

http://work.alberta.ca/documents/WHS-PUB_ch019.pdf

Asbestos Containing Materials in Buildings to be Demolished

http://work.alberta.ca/documents/WHS-PUB_ASB003.pdf

Guidelines for the Disposal of Asbestos Waste

<http://environment.gov.ab.ca/info/library/7247.pdf>


Contact us:

Province-Wide Contact Centre

-  Edmonton
780-415-8690
-  Other locations
1-866-415-8690
(Toll Free)

Web Site

 www.work.alberta.ca

-  Deaf or hearing impaired
 - Edmonton 780-427-9999
 - Other locations 1-800-232-7215
(Toll Free)


Getting copies of *OHS Act, Regulation & Code*:

Queen's Printer

 www.qp.alberta.ca

Occupational Health and Safety

 <http://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/295.html>

 Edmonton 780-427-4952

Call any Government of Alberta office toll-free
Dial 310-0000, then the area code and telephone number you want to reach

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