

How to Find and Remove Asbestos in your Older Home

If the home you live in was built between 1945 and the 1980s, it is likely that it was built using some types of asbestos-containing construction materials. Even homes built prior to that date may contain such materials, as renovations carried out during these decades are likely to have involved the addition of asbestos-containing products.

Asbestos in older homes may present an exposure risk if the asbestos-containing materials are in poor condition, are broken, or are beginning to deteriorate due to normal wear and tear. If the material is friable—meaning that it can be broken with normal hand pressure—steps should be taken to manage the risk of exposure. Exposure to asbestos has been known to cause [mesothelioma](#) and [asbestos cancer](#).



Asbestos-containing Materials Used in Older Homes

Asbestos can be found in many locations in older homes, including the following:

- Roofing materials, including tiles, felting, and adhesives.
- Insulation of all kinds, including wall insulation, electrical tape and wadding, around furnaces and stoves, and as pipe covering.
- Flooring was used in tile and sheet vinyl form. Adhesives used to affix flooring also contained asbestos.
- Textured plaster was used as an acoustical ceiling treatment and as a decorative element for walls and ceilings.
- Millboard, rollboard and other sheet products were used for wall framing. Joint compounds and plaster used to patch holes and seams also contained asbestos.

Asbestos Identification

Identifying asbestos by sight alone is difficult, if not impossible, unless the material is labeled. The best way of positively identifying asbestos-containing construction materials

is to have them tested by a certified professional. It is particularly important to leave the materials undisturbed until you are able confirm whether asbestos is actually present. Do not attempt to repair or remove the materials yourself. Even testing should be left to a professional, rather than doing this yourself. Instead, contact a licensed asbestos surveyor to confirm the presence of asbestos.

A professional asbestos surveyor can safely take samples of materials suspected to contain asbestos, which are then laboratory tested to determine whether asbestos is present. An asbestos surveyor can also provide advice on the state of the materials and whether repair, encapsulation, or removal will be necessary.



Asbestos Repair and Removal

If an asbestos inspector confirms the presence of asbestos in your home, they will also be able to advise you on how to proceed with limiting exposure and preventing further deterioration of asbestos-containing materials. You will generally have two options for managing asbestos-containing materials in your home: repair and removal.

Whether or not asbestos should be removed, or can simply be repaired, depends on the condition of the materials and whether they are friable, and the location of the materials. In most cases, asbestos-containing materials should be left alone without posing any risk of exposure, as it is often more risky to remove the materials.

Repairing asbestos-containing materials involves covering or sealing them to prevent asbestos fibers becoming airborne. Asbestos-containing materials can be either encapsulated or enclosed.

- When asbestos is encapsulated, it is covered with a sealant that traps asbestos fibers and prevents their release.
- Enclosing asbestos means wrapping the material with a protective wrap to prevent the release of asbestos fibers.

Regardless of the process taken to repair the asbestos, it remains in place and removal is not attempted. This is much less expensive than removing the asbestos, and unless the asbestos is in very poor condition, is also safer. However, depending on the type of

asbestos-containing material involved and the method used to repair it, the repair process may make later removal, if it becomes necessary, more difficult and more expensive.

Removal is generally a last resort, unless state or local regulations require it that it be carried out. However, if the asbestos is so badly damaged that it cannot be repaired, or if demolition or renovation will cause major disturbance of asbestos, removal is usually necessary. Removal of asbestos is a complicated and hazardous process, and should only be carried out by an accredited asbestos professional. Attempting to remove asbestos yourself can increase the health risks of exposure much more than if it had been left undisturbed.

Further Precautions for Homeowners

Prior to repair or removal of asbestos, precautions should be taken to prevent asbestos fibers becoming airborne. The danger of this occurring will depend on the location of the asbestos and the type and condition of the materials involved.



- Keep activity to a minimum in the area where asbestos-containing materials will be repaired or removed, to prevent further damage.
- Don't sweep, dust, or vacuum in the area where asbestos-containing materials are located.
- If you are unable to avoid walking through an area where asbestos-containing materials are located, clean with a wet mop rather than sweeping or dusting.
- An accredited professional should be hired for even minor repairs, as even a minor disturbance can release asbestos fibers.

For more information on asbestos, please visit [The Asbestos & Mesothelioma Center](#)