

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a strong, fire-resistant mineral fibre. In the past, asbestos was used as insulation against heat or noise and for fire protection. It was also added to materials such as cement and plaster to give them more structural strength.

Where was asbestos used in older homes?

Until the early 1980s, many products containing asbestos were used in house construction. Some products, such as asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation, were used in homes right up until the late 1980s. The drawing in this pamphlet shows many possible sources of asbestos in older homes. When you are renovating or demolishing an older house, there is a high probability of encountering asbestos-containing materials.

If asbestos-containing materials are in good condition and left intact, they do not pose a significant danger of releasing asbestos fibres into the air you breathe. However, these materials are hazardous when they deteriorate or are disturbed, such as when they are handled, sanded, drilled into, or broken up so that they crumble. To avoid disturbing asbestos-containing materials, you must know where they are *before* you begin renovations.

What are the hazards of asbestos?

Renovating or demolishing houses containing asbestos products can release asbestos fibres, which are extremely fine and can stay in the air for hours. Breathing in asbestos fibres may cause serious health problems, including lung disease and cancer.

Asbestosis is the name given to scarring and stiffening of the lungs caused by inhaling asbestos dust over many years. It makes breathing difficult and may lead to fatal diseases such as pneumonia and heart disease. Exposure to asbestos can also cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, which is a rare cancer of the linings of the lungs and abdomen.

Asbestos-related diseases usually develop many years after a person has been exposed to asbestos. The risk of developing these diseases increases with the amount of asbestos in the air you inhale and the length of time you are exposed. Smokers are at an increased risk.



As a minimum, a respirator fitted with a NIOSH 100 (HEPA) filter should be worn to provide a basic level of protection. In some situations, other types of respirators may be required.

What can homeowners do?

If you are a homeowner doing your own renovations and not employing other workers, you will want to take precautions to avoid inhaling asbestos fibres and contaminating your home. Asbestos-containing materials should be identified and removed by someone trained in asbestos removal and wearing protective clothing and a respirator. Contact your municipality to find out how to dispose of asbestos-containing materials so that they do not contaminate landfills.

Contact the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation at 1 800 668-2642 or Health Canada at 604 666-2083 for information for homeowners.

What must employers and workers do before beginning renovation or demolition work?

Employers and owners/builders are responsible for the health and safety of workers employed on the site. They must have a qualified person inspect the site to identify any asbestos that may be handled, disturbed, or removed. (For more information on acceptable credentials for asbestos consultants, refer to *OHS Guideline G6.6-3: Qualifications*, part of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation materials on the WorkSafeBC web site, WorkSafeBC.com.)

The removal must be done by trained and qualified workers using the proper protective equipment.

Employers and workers can contact WorkSafeBC for more information on working safely around asbestos. Call 604 276-3100 or toll-free 1 888 621-SAFE (7233).

Where can I find qualified help?

Asbestos survey and removal companies can be found in the Yellow Pages under Asbestos Abatement & Removal, or Health and Safety Consultants, or Environmental Consultants.

More information for employers and workers

HiddenKiller.ca is a comprehensive web site on asbestos-exposure prevention. The site covers the hazards of asbestos, where it can be found, and how it should be handled. Additional asbestos resources can be found at WorkSafeBC.com:

Safe Work Practices for Handling Asbestos
This booklet is available online or in print. Click on “Publications” on the home page.

Safety at Work Centre for Construction
On the home page, click on “Safety at Work,” and then click on “Construction.”

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation
Look for “Occupational Health and Safety Regulation” on the home page. Part 6 deals with asbestos, and Part 20 with demolition.

*OHS Guideline G6.8:
Procedures for abatement of asbestos-containing material (ACM) during house and building demolition/renovation*

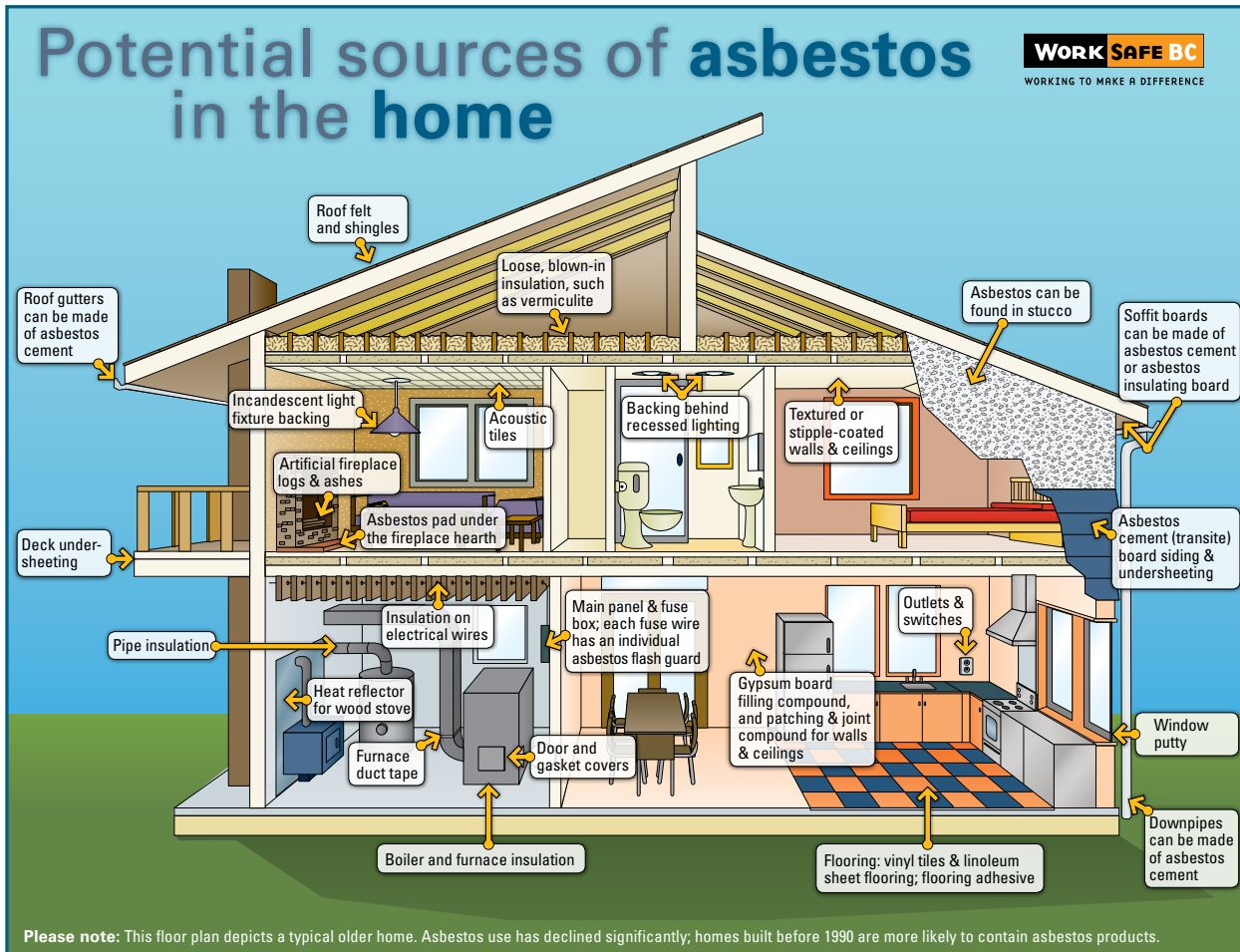
*OHS Guideline G20.112:
Hazardous materials — Asbestos*

To find a guideline, type the guideline number (e.g., G20.112) in the search box at the top of the home page.

Notice of Project Form for Asbestos or Lead
Look for “Forms” on the home page. Notice of Project is Form 52E49.

Asbestos Hazards When Renovating Older Homes

Potential sources of asbestos



These products may contain asbestos, depending on the age of the building and the materials used to manufacture the product.

More information for homeowners

The following web sites and agencies can provide homeowners with information on asbestos-exposure prevention when doing renovations on an older home:

HiddenKiller.ca
WorkSafeBC asbestos web site

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)
Phone: 1 800 668-2642
Web site: www.cmhc.ca
On the web site, search for "asbestos."
The online publication *Asbestos* is also available free in print as part of the *About Your House* series.

Health Canada
Phone: 604 666-2083
Web site: www.hc-sc.gc.ca
On the web site, look for "asbestos" and "vermiculite" in the A-Z index.

