

# Asbestos Awareness

**Asbestos is a carcinogen** composed of microscopic fibers that can attach to internal organs when inhaled or ingested. The size of asbestos fibers makes it almost undetectable, but no amount is safe, which is why information about the risks of exposure is a high priority for prevention against asbestos-related diseases. The EPA notes that asbestos has tensile strength and heat resistance qualities useful for various construction and building materials, primarily as an insulative or flame retardant additive. Once the fibers become airborne, inhalation can lead to internal irritation and scarring, causing health effects and even cancer.

**Mesothelioma is a known type of cancer** associated with asbestos exposure. After initial contact with the carcinogen, this cancer has upwards of a 50 year latency period and is regarded as an aggressive and rare disease that can affect anyone. Symptoms of asbestos inhalation include coughing, chest pain, trouble breathing, and other conditions related to respiratory complications. Unfortunately, the results of asbestos entering the body are permanent, and there is no cure for mesothelioma. Although, recent advancements in treatment offer improved prognosis and end-of-life care for patients after a diagnosis.

**The prevalence of asbestos in the U.S.** makes it a common air pollutant and environmental toxin in a variety of products such as:

- Floor and ceiling tiles
- Cement
- Roof
- Gaskets
- Coatings
- Adhesives
- Bonds
- Seals

Any home built prior to the 1980s is likely to house asbestos-containing materials (ACMs), which present a hazard when they become deteriorated and disrupted. Due to the nature of this mineral, it was previously considered an advantageous additive to the majority of building materials. This past use has put millions in danger of developing serious illnesses. Currently, advocating for further asbestos restrictions and a total ban is an extensive part of prevention.

**Occupations that can lead to increased risks of asbestos** exposure include construction workers, firefighters, agricultural workers, home renovators, or anyone doing work where fibers can infiltrate the air. Employees who handle or may come into contact with asbestos are not as prone to exposure in recent years due to mitigation and bans that protect their health and safety. However, some manufacturing of the minerals is still allowed, specifically in the building and automotive industries.

**If you suspect asbestos in your home**, you should seek professional asbestos abatement companies for proper removal. ACMs are hazardous and risky materials that should not be attempted to mitigate alone. Making sure to address broken or worn-out materials can help assess areas that could lead to asbestos exposure. Products that have been well-maintained and show no signs of damage or deterioration are most likely harmless, but should still be encapsulated by a professional.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services provides advice on protecting the public from asbestos exposure: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/asbestos/index.htm>

Information can help educate others to stop unnecessary and avoidable contact. While the CDC, OSHA, and government sites are strong resources for asbestos statistics and particulars, certified contractors trained in asbestos handling are most suitable for removing ACMs and should be contacted in the case of discovering them.

Resources:

For more information from the EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/asbestos/learn-about-asbestos#asbestos>

For more information regarding mesothelioma and asbestos: <https://www.mesothelioma.com/>