

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ASBESTOS

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral found in rocks and its predominant property is a strong resistance to cold, heat and fire, which for many years made it an attractive insulating material for pipes, pipe joints, boilers, tanks, ducts, etc...

When does asbestos become a health hazard and dangerous to my family's health?

Asbestos becomes hazardous when it becomes damaged and deteriorated over a period of years. When asbestos becomes friable, which means it becomes flaky and crumbly and can be pulverized into powder with hand pressure, it can release both visible and invisible asbestos fibers into the air. The microscopic fibers that you can't see can become inhaled and lodged in the lungs and after a period of exposure can cause asbestosis, lung cancer, mesothelioma and other asbestos related diseases. Unfortunately, the presence of these diseases is not evident until fifteen to twenty years after exposure.

How can we determine if we have asbestos containing materials (ACM) in our home and if they are friable?

An inspection conducted by one of our consultants trained and knowledgeable in the field of asbestos will identify the presence of ACM in two ways. A visual inspection will verify the presence of ACM on pipe coverings and most boilers, since these insulating materials manufactured prior to 1978 virtually always contained asbestos. Our consultants can also grade the condition of your asbestos in good, fair or poor condition. Our trained eye will also note other suspicious areas such as fire retardant ceilings above furnaces, duct coverings and insulation behind radiators, to name a few. Our consultant might wish to collect a bulk sample of a suspect area and send it to a laboratory for analysis under a polarized light microscope. When we take a sample, there is a nominal service charge collected for which you will receive 100% credit against your bill, should you decide to use our service.

When should the asbestos be removed from our homes?

It is an accepted fact that all asbestos should be removed when it is in a friable state and has deteriorated. It should also be mentioned that all asbestos will at some point in time become friable and that there is no safe exposure limit. Since it was used mostly in older homes, the chances are that if your home is older than thirty to forty years that the asbestos has deteriorated to a fair to poor condition.

What alternatives do we have for making our home safe from the asbestos risk?

Contrary to popular thought, "wrapping" ACM covering with plastic, foil etc. is not considered an acceptable option for asbestos abatement and there is no provision in the law for this type of unreliable remedy.

There are basically two alternatives open to a New York State licensed contractor under the law. The only way to eliminate the risk completely is through removal, transportation and legal disposal according to strict regulations and guidelines established by the Federal government under OSHA and EPA and the State of New York Asbestos Control Program, Industrial Code Rule 56 and the City of New York, Local Law 76. Asbestos which is in good condition can be repaired and encapsulated. While this serves as a stop-gap health measure, the asbestos is still in place and will have to be dealt with at a later time. In a private home, on pipe or duct coverings, the cost differential is usually minimal because the same precautions and safety factors must be observed in both processes and the only savings is generally the waste disposal cost. For economic sense, we recommend repair and encapsulation of boilers which have outside asbestos coverings since once you remove the covering from the boiler, you must either re-insulate or scrap the boiler and this can become a costly process.

Is the asbestos removal process safe, or will it spread the problem to the rest of my home?

The total concept of safe asbestos removal or repair and encapsulation centers upon the containment of the fibers during the abatement

process and the complete protection of both the asbestos handler and your home environment. In New York State any contractor who removes or repairs and encapsulates asbestos must have a valid Asbestos Contractors License and all the employees must be New York State licensed handlers. The latest state of the art technology for pipe and duct covering removals is the moveable glove bag method. This method is approved and recommended by the USEPA, the State of New York and the City of New York. There are now glove bags available in twenty or thirty different configurations and for coverings up to 60" diameter. In this process the workers insert their hands into the sleeves and gloves of the 10 mil thick plastic bag which is totally sealed around the pipe or duct. There are disposable tools pre-packed into the bag at the factory and there are special portals for the use of spray bottles and a Hepa Vacuum. All of the contaminated fibers stay within the bag and never come in contact with the outside environment. We take additional precautions when using the glove bag beyond what is prescribed by law. Our handlers seal the work area off from the rest of the house by sealing all openings and place plastic on the floor. The glove bag method is the most widely used in private homes and is the safest and most economical method. There are situations in which the glove bag cannot be used such as boiler and ceiling asbestos removal. In these cases we have to erect critical barriers by totally plasticizing all the walls and floors and we must establish negative air filtration through the use of a special machine equipped with Hepa filters to trap all the asbestos particles. After removal of the asbestos the pipe or other surface must be sealed with a post abatement lock down sealant, this is necessitated by the fact that even copious scrubbing will not remove all the microscopic fibers and these must be permanently bonded to the pipe. The product we use is heat resistant to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit and we guarantee in writing that it won't chip, blister or peel for 40 years. In either method, since we cannot distinguish between asbestos fibers and dirt, the laws require us to totally Hepa Vacuum and wet clean the entire work area. This is where our company excels. Special attention is paid to crucial areas such as

the inside of your washer and drier which are usually in an asbestos contaminated area.

How can we tell that our home has been properly cleaned and that the air quality is acceptable?

In accordance with NYS Asbestos Control Law, Rule 56; air monitoring and laboratory sample analysis must be performed by an independent third party, before and after removal. We can recommend and arrange for a laboratory to do this or you can choose your own laboratory. In either case, you must pay the lab directly. The technician, who is licensed by the State of New York, will collect a specific volume of air in a cassette using a vacuum pump. These sample cassettes are sent to a laboratory which has accreditation by both the USEPA and New York State Department of Health, ELAP, (and has a Certified Industrial Hygienist in attendance.) The samples are analyzed using the PCM method of microscopy. In addition, we only use labs that can Fax us the results within 24 hours after collection. It should be noted that our critical barriers will remain in place and not be removed until the air sample results are acceptable to us. The USEPA and State consider testing to 0.01 fibers per cubic centimeter of air as acceptable clean-air clearance criteria.

What legal documentation should we anticipate receiving?

Asbestos is a hazardous waste and as such the law clearly holds the owner (generator) of the waste completely responsible for the safe and legal removal, transportation and disposal. The waste manifest literally traces the asbestos waste from your doorstep to us as the licensed contractor to our State DEC licensed hauler who transports it to an approved asbestos waste landfill. We are currently disposing our waste in Ohio and beyond. Since we deal with many real estate brokers, attorneys, banks etc. at house closings, we have created our own affidavit which certifies that everything that we have described above has been properly done in accordance with the law. These documents together with the air sample results should be kept in a safe place along with the deed to your house and other important papers.

What about re-insulation?

Most heating contractors agree that re-insulation of pipes should be predicated on personal comfort levels and most people are not re-insulating. The dollar energy loss is so insignificant you wouldn't notice it on your heating bill! Many customers tell us that the first floor of their home which tended to be cool in winter, now feels warmer because of the heat radiating up through the floor. If you are using your basement as a children's playroom, we strongly advise either re-insulating or enclosing pipes so that little ones can't reach up and burn themselves. Boilers and flue ducts should usually be re-insulated for both heat retention and potential exposure to carbon monoxide fumes and your heating contractor should be consulted in this regard. We suggest that you live with exposed pipes for a winter heating season and then decide if you wish to re-insulate. If you wish to have us do your re-insulation, we can provide fiberglass wall and PVC elbows and joints for pipe coverings and mineral wool covered with adhesive cement for boilers, at an additional cost.

Is asbestos removal really worth the cost?

How can anyone place a value on their health or that of their loved ones? But beyond the peace of mind and the satisfaction of knowing that your family's exposure at home has been eliminated, there is a realistic economic consideration. A home with asbestos has a diminished resale value! Astute and knowledgeable home buyers are demanding that the asbestos be removed before closing on their homes and in fact, some of them won't even consider purchasing a home with asbestos present. Home inspectors are "red-flagging" homes with asbestos problems. In most cases, the cost of removal is probably considerably less than you imagined.

As public health professionals, we are anxious to help you understand the complexities of asbestos removal.

If you have any questions that we have not covered please ask our consultants when they visit your home for your free estimate and inspection.

What You Should Know About Asbestos in Your Home