



Asbestos in Weatherization

When your home receives an Energy Audit, your auditor will also be looking carefully for things that may impact your health and safety. That means that your auditor may take note of building materials that may contain asbestos. **Asbestos** is a naturally occurring mineral fiber mined from the earth. It is heat and chemical resistant and was commonly used in building materials from the early 1900s through the mid 1980s.

Common Places to Find Asbestos

Asbestos has been used in more than 3,000 different construction materials and manufactured products, including many materials found in homes. A few construction products that could contain asbestos include:

- Vermiculite attic or wall insulation
- Floor and ceiling tiles
- Plaster, joint compound, and wall textures
- Insulation or tape on pipes and ducts
- Siding, often slate or concrete composite siding

Impact on Health

When disturbed, asbestos breaks down into very small fibers up to 1,200 times thinner than a human hair. These tiny fibers easily become airborne and when inhaled, they can travel deep into the lungs and become trapped in lung tissue. Once trapped, these fibers can cause mesothelioma, lung cancer as well as asbestosis. There's no known safe level of asbestos exposure, and medical research indicates these fibers can cause severe lung diseases and cancer in 10 to 30 years after the initial asbestos exposure.

Asbestos Approaches

Asbestos is generally only a problem when it becomes *friable*, which means it has been broken, crumbled, sanded, scraped or otherwise disturbed and thus able to become airborne. There are three approaches dealing with asbestos in homes and each approach depends on the situation.

1. Leave it alone

Asbestos is only a problem if asbestos fibers are released into the air. If the asbestos material is in good condition and if it is not being disturbed, then it is unlikely to release asbestos fibers. The safest and least costly option may be to leave the asbestos material alone.

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2. Repair it

Sometimes, asbestos materials can be repaired. If the asbestos material has minimal damage, it may be repaired by *encapsulating*.

3. Remove it

Removing the asbestos material—also known as *abatement*—may be the best option if the asbestos material is extensively damaged or if it will be disturbed by renovation or other activities.

Your Weatherization Project

Your Weatherization provider will inform you if asbestos is to be disturbed or removed (abated) as a part of the weatherization process. In Weatherization, the most common asbestos abatement is the removal of vermiculite attic insulation, although other abatements may be necessary for weatherization work to proceed.

In some cases, the presence of asbestos may require your home to be deferred, which means the Weatherization work can not take place. In other situations, your Service Provider may be able to cover the costs of abatement through Federal and State grant programs.

If abatement is necessary, your Weatherization provider will take many steps to protect your safety. This may include using a Minnesota licensed asbestos contractor to remove asbestos, ensuring the asbestos is handled and disposed of safely, and that the air is sampled to ensure safety after the project.

Learn More

Asbestos in Minnesota Homes

www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/asbestos/homeowner/asbinhomes.html

Protect Your Family from Asbestos

www.epa.gov/asbestos/protect-your-family-exposures-asbestos