

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Post-Disaster Renovations and Asbestos for Homeowners and Workers

Following a natural disaster, homeowners may need to quickly conduct emergency renovations or demolition of their homes. Many homes, particularly older homes, may contain asbestos, a known carcinogen. Asbestos that has been disturbed may pose a health hazard to homeowners, contractors or volunteers aiding with disaster recovery.

Homeowners should contact state or local public health authorities if they believe a damaged building contains asbestos. EPA strongly recommends that all renovations involving materials that contain asbestos be handled by specially-trained personnel. Residents should temporarily vacate the apartment or house until the work has been done and the area has been properly cleaned.

Home and building products that may contain asbestos:

Residential and commercial structures built before 1975 may contain significant amounts of asbestos. Large structures built before 1975 typically contain pipe wrap, siding, ceiling tiles, and other building materials that are high in asbestos content. Structures built after 1975 may also contain asbestos.

Materials that may contain asbestos include:

- Sprayed-on materials like soundproofing or decorative material;
- Pipes or other insulation;
- Popcorn ceilings;
- Patching and joint compounds for walls and ceilings;
- Textured paints;
- Some roofing and siding shingles;
- Resilient floor tiles (vinyl, asphalt, rubber); and
- Backing on vinyl sheet flooring, and adhesives used for installing floor tile.

How to Manage an Asbestos Problem

If you have materials that contain asbestos that have been damaged, there are two ways to correct the problem: repair or removal. Repair usually involves either sealing or covering asbestos material, and EPA strongly

continued on back >

Asbestos Do's and Don't's for the Homeowner

- Do keep activities to a minimum in any areas having damaged material that may contain asbestos.
- Do take every precaution to avoid damaging asbestos material.
- Don't dust, sweep, or vacuum debris that may contain asbestos.
- Don't track material that could contain asbestos through the house. If you cannot avoid walking through the area, have it cleaned with a wet mop. If the material is from a damaged area, or if a large area must be cleaned, call an asbestos professional.
- Don't saw, sand, scrape, or drill holes in asbestos materials.
- Don't use abrasive pads or brushes on power strippers to strip wax from asbestos flooring. Never use a power stripper on a dry floor.
- Don't sand or try to level asbestos flooring or its backing. When asbestos flooring needs replacing, install new floor covering over it, if possible.

Additional Information on Managing Asbestos:

EPA Asbestos Website: <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>

EPA Guidelines for Catastrophic Emergency Situations Involving Asbestos: <http://go.usa.gov/gqUQ>

New Jersey Guidance for the Management of Asbestos-containing Material: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/dshw/rrtp/asbestos.htm>

New York State Asbestos Law: <http://nycosh.org/index.php?page=Asbestos-Fact-Sheet-No-3>

New York City Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene Asbestos Fact Sheet: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ei/eiasbest.shtml>

recommends that all renovations involving materials that contain asbestos be handled by specially-trained personnel.

- Sealing, or encapsulation, involves treating the material with a sealant that either binds the asbestos fibers together or coats the material so fibers are not released. Pipe, furnace and boiler insulation can sometimes be repaired this way.
- Covering, or enclosure, involves placing something over or around the material that contains asbestos to prevent release of fibers. Exposed insulated piping may be covered with a protective wrap or jacket.

Demolition

- In all instances, workers should use equipment specifically designed to protect them from asbestos exposures during demolition and handling of debris, especially respirators, as required under OSHA.
- Heavy equipment that is used to demolish structures or that is run over debris from the hurricane will rupture the building materials and may cause asbestos to be released. Therefore, it is very important to wet the structure before demolition and keep the structure wet during demolition. Wetting the structure is crucial because it reduces the potential for air migration of asbestos.
- EPA recommends knocking down each structure wall-by-wall, folding it in on itself to minimize excess breakage of asbestos containing material.
- Keep the debris wetted and covered until it is possible to consult with the asbestos trained person to segregate out asbestos containing material to the extent feasible. If asbestos is known to be present but can not be safely segregated, dispose of all the debris as if it is asbestos containing materials as discussed below.

Removal of Asbestos Containing Material

- After you have collapsed the structure, if feasible, place the asbestos containing material into leak proof wrapping. If the volume of the material precludes use of leak proof wrapping, continue to wet the asbestos containing material and use heavy lifting equipment to place the asbestos containing material into waiting dump trucks. Whenever possible, use a plastic liner in the bottom of the bed of the dump truck to minimize the leakage of contaminated water from the dump truck. If the asbestos containing material has been further broken up during the loading process, wet it down again after you load it into the dump truck.
- Cover the dump truck with a tarp, sealing it so that debris and dust cannot be released during transport.
- A large sign should be placed on the dump trucks as they are being loaded and unloaded with asbestos-containing building materials. The sign should read "Warning: Asbestos Hazard. Stay Away"

Disposal of Asbestos Containing Material

- Truck the debris to a landfill allowed to receive asbestos. Contact state authorities for a list of asbestos approved landfills.
- Maintain your waste shipment records.

Worker Safety, Notification and Expertise Issues

- Workers conducting renovations or demolition work that involves materials containing asbestos should adhere to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations for asbestos: http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_Hurricane_Facts/AsbestosHazards.pdf
- Workers conducting demolitions should notify the appropriate state or local air quality management program as early as possible prior to the start of the demolition but, in any event, no later than the following workday after starting the demolition.
- At least one person, either a government official or private contractor, trained in the asbestos National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP) regulations should be on site or available by cell phone during the demolition to provide assistance and guidance.
- NESHAP asbestos regulations still apply in the case of a catastrophe, though residences with four or fewer units are generally exempted from NESHAP requirements for asbestos disposal, demolition and renovation.