

# STATE OF COLORADO

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Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado

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Colorado Department  
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## WHAT IS ASBESTOS AND WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT IT?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals. Asbestos fibers are very stable, and are resistant to both heat and chemicals. The addition of asbestos fibers adds strength and durability to many products. To date, more than 3,000 different products have been manufactured with asbestos fibers. Asbestos has never been banned totally from being added to building products and may be found in buildings/homes of any age, including new construction.

Asbestos in building materials is not a risk to human health unless it is disturbed. Inhalation of asbestos fibers may lead to increased risk for one or more diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. Although scientists have not been able to determine the amount of asbestos exposure needed to cause disease, it is known that the exposure is dose-responsive. In other words, the greater the exposure and the longer it lasts, the greater the risk of developing an asbestos-related disease. The goal, therefore, is to minimize one's exposure to asbestos over a lifetime. Typically, asbestos-related diseases have a long latency period. The latency period is the time between the exposure and the onset of disease. With exposure to asbestos, symptoms may not appear for 15 to 25 years after exposure, sometimes longer. If you have specific health questions, you should contact your personal physician.

## WHERE IS ASBESTOS COMMONLY FOUND?

A partial list of building materials that may contain asbestos includes: floor tile and related mastics (glue); roofing shingles and flashing; wall and ceiling textures, including "popcorn" or "cottage cheese" textures; pipe, duct and boiler insulation; linoleum; drywall and drywall mud (joint compound); vermiculite insulation; cement asbestos board shingles and siding; and acoustic ceiling tile and plaster.

## HAVE I BEEN EXPOSED TO ASBESTOS?

When a building has been damaged, asbestos-containing material (ACM) may have been disturbed. In order to determine if ACM is present in the building, an inspection by an asbestos building inspector certified by the state of Colorado must take place. The owner of the building is required, by regulation, to hire a certified inspector to properly inspect the building and sample materials thought to contain asbestos. The owner should work quickly to obtain the services of trained personnel to determine if an asbestos spill has occurred.

If ACM was disturbed during the incident, there may have been a release of asbestos fibers. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine after the fact what exposure, if any, may have occurred. Water may have been applied to the building; wetting building materials is one of the most effective engineering controls used to prevent asbestos fibers from becoming airborne. Asbestos fibers, once stabilized by water or other means, pose minimal, if any, health risk to those nearby.

If asbestos is discovered in materials that have been disturbed during the incident, further investigation may be required to determine if adjacent areas were affected. If your building/area suffered physical or smoke damage, it is possible that asbestos fibers could have become airborne and migrated to that location. In that case, air or dust samples may need to be taken to help determine the extent of the spill.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSPECTING PROPERTY FOR POSSIBLE ASBESTOS CONTAMINATION?

The owner of the damaged property is responsible for having it property inspected. Adjacent properties, if affected by smoke or debris, should be evaluated as well. If you need to have samples taken at your property, a list of registered Asbestos Consulting Firms can be found at: [www.cdphe.state.co.us/ap/asbestos/index.html](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ap/asbestos/index.html).

State of Colorado asbestos compliance officers are charged with enforcing state and federal regulations pertaining to asbestos. They conduct inspections to determine if regulations are being adhered to at spill sites. **State personnel, however, do not conduct sampling or remediation activities.**

A state asbestos compliance officer is available Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (303) 692-3100 to answer asbestos-related questions. Other regulations also are concerned with exposure to asbestos fibers. Your situation may fall under the jurisdiction of either the Occupational Safety and Health Administration or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF ASBESTOS IS FOUND?

If asbestos is found in building materials that have been disturbed, it may be necessary for the property owner to hire a state-certified asbestos contractor to have the contamination remediated and the building cleaned. This is a private contractor that uses trained and certified workers to perform asbestos abatement. The contractor is required to obtain a permit from the state before conducting the work and they must follow accepted procedures to remove the materials in a safe and controlled manner. Building owners are advised of their responsibilities for dealing with a major asbestos spill. State or local asbestos compliance officers may visit the site to ensure that the work is proceeding in accordance with applicable regulations.

If a building owner refuses to comply with the requirements set forth in Colorado's asbestos regulation, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment will issue an Order for them to do so. Failure to comply with an Order will force the matter into the court system, where the building owner faces the possibility of criminal penalties and imprisonment.

## WHAT IF I LIVE OR WORK IN THE BUILDING?

Access to the building may need to be restricted until an inspection for asbestos-containing material can be performed. You should be aware that other issues, such as arson/criminal investigation or structural integrity, also might require restricting access to the building. Until an affected area can be assessed properly, there may be a risk to anyone entering the area. Once the potential risks are understood and conveyed to building occupants, state or local health department officials may or may not allow building occupants temporary access to the property to retrieve essential items. Some examples of these items include: keys; medicine; glasses; wallets and purses; money, credit cards and checkbooks; pets; important papers; laptop computers; essential school and/or business materials; and minimal clothing. If you are permitted to remove items, you will be given written instructions by the health department on how to safely handle them. Your building owner/management will have information as to if, and when, access to the building will be permitted.

The initial inspection process will take some time, so please be patient until it can be determined if there is a hazard present. If the area is deemed part of a major asbestos spill, remaining items within the area are required to be either decontaminated by a state-certified asbestos contractor or disposed of as asbestos-contaminated waste. Contact building management or your insurance company about remaining items.