



DEPT. OF WATER, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT

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General Asbestos Information

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral mined throughout the world, primarily in Canada, China, and parts of the United States and South America. Asbestos has been used in over 3,000 commercial products such as pipe and boiler insulation, sprayed-on acoustic and decorative textures, vinyl floor tile and linoleum, and cementitious, transite or slate siding and roofing; however, it can be broken into small, unseen fibers that remain airborne indefinitely and travel long distances. Products containing Asbestos are being replaced with alternative materials, when possible, but you can still purchase products that contain asbestos such as vinyl asbestos floor tile and brake pads. Many materials that contain asbestos are being removed from existing buildings and are being replaced with materials that do not contain asbestos.

Is asbestos dangerous to my health?

There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure. Inhalation of asbestos fibers causes the most significant health concern. Damaged asbestos-containing material is more likely to release fibers than asbestos material that is not damaged. If asbestos-containing material is dry and can be crumbled by hand pressure (friable) a fiber release is more likely than if the material is “nonfriable”. The more that the asbestos material is disturbed, the more likely a fiber release will occur. When a release occurs, the small fibers may be inhaled and become deposited into the airways and lungs. Due to the physical characteristics of asbestos, the fibers may remain in the respiratory system indefinitely. Each asbestos exposure increases your risk of developing an asbestos related disease.

Diseases from asbestos exposure may not appear for 10-20 years after exposure. Mesothelioma is a fatal form of cancer caused by asbestos exposure. It is a cancer of the membranes that line the chest and abdomen. Asbestosis is scarring of the lung tissue caused by asbestos fibers. This is a noncancerous, respiratory disease that is irreversible. Asbestos exposure may also cause lung cancer. Workers who smoke and are exposed to asbestos are 50 times more likely to develop lung cancer than the general public. The risks associated with low level, non-occupational exposure have not been established and are almost impossible to validate.

Who regulates asbestos?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAPS – 40 CFR 61 Subpart M) in 1973 for the purposes of protecting the general public from asbestos exposure. The NESHAP regulations apply to renovations and demolitions of commercial, public, industrial, and institutional facilities; asbestos manufacturing; milling; roadways; and disposal. Residential buildings with fewer than four dwelling units are exempt from most

of the NESHAP regulations. The regulations specify notification requirements, work practices and disposal requirements.

The Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE) has been delegated the authority to oversee compliance with the NESHAP regulations. The Lincoln Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) is responsible for the NESHAP program in Lancaster County and the Omaha Air Quality Control (OAQC) agency is responsible for the program within Omaha city limits.

The EPA developed the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which first authorized EPA to develop the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) in 1986. The AHERA regulations set standards for inspections and management plans for asbestos in schools. The AHERA regulations necessitate training and accreditation for those who work with asbestos. Currently, the EPA oversees the AHERA program.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has developed regulations for the State of Nebraska found in Title 178 – The Nebraska Asbestos Control Program. These regulations are in addition to the NESHAP and AHERA regulations that must be complied with by regulated parties in Nebraska. The regulations specify accreditation, licensure, work practices, notification, audits, inspections and fees for asbestos projects. The DHHS Title 178 asbestos regulations are more stringent than the NESHAPs and AHERA regulations. For additional information about asbestos and asbestos removal, visit the DHHS Asbestos webpage.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed regulations that protect asbestos workers. Employers must follow specific work practices and guidelines to insure minimal exposure for their employees in the asbestos industry. The federal government manages the OSHA asbestos regulations for Nebraska.

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