

The Ever- Present Asbestos Hazard

Few hazards exist within interior of office and retail structures. However, one exists that is becoming a growing problem in older buildings, particularly larger commercial properties as their fixtures deteriorate. This hazard is asbestos exposure. Many people believe asbestos to be a problem of the past. And while they may be correct that most (but not all) asbestos products were banned in the late 1970's by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the fact is that asbestos still remains in 78% of structures erected prior to 1980. What's important to keep in mind is that the longer asbestos remains in place, the more likely it is to become hazardous to those in the vicinity. Most building owners are not aware that Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations require that owners of buildings constructed before 1980 must have an asbestos building inspection performed. If asbestos-containing materials are noted, then there are stringent follow-on requirements for maintenance, labeling, notification and training. Failure to comply can lead to serious fines as well as tort actions by building inhabitants.

Asbestos was utilized as an insulation and durability compound in many construction materials at the height of its use. It could be found in boilers, machine linings, insulation, and pipe coverings. When these materials are stable and well maintained, they are not in and of themselves dangerous. It is only as they age or become damaged that the asbestos fibers can be released. For example, a ceiling tile made with asbestos that is not damaged or cracked is likely not an immediate hazard but should be replaced eventually. However, if that ceiling tile has been broken down by water or other damage and is brittle to the touch, it poses a hazard.

As asbestos materials are damaged, there is a potential for fiber release into the air supply. Simple precautions can be taken to assure there is no immediate asbestos hazard in your building. An air quality test by a licensed inspector or asbestos consultant in the vicinity of known asbestos materials can indicate if there are levels of asbestos in the air. If that's the case, these products should be removed by a state certified and properly insured asbestos abatement company. This is particularly important should the asbestos material be within a high human traffic volume area of a particular building, where sustained exposures are likely.

Inhaled asbestos fibers are extremely hazardous and are associated with myriad lung complications, including the deadly cancer [mesothelioma](#). There are few options for mesothelioma treatment and other complications associated with asbestos exposure are

similarly difficult to diagnose and remedy. However, all can be avoided if asbestos is handled and disposed of properly by a certified abatement company. Asbestos professionals will be able to assist in identifying hazardous asbestos and advise the building owner on the action they should take.